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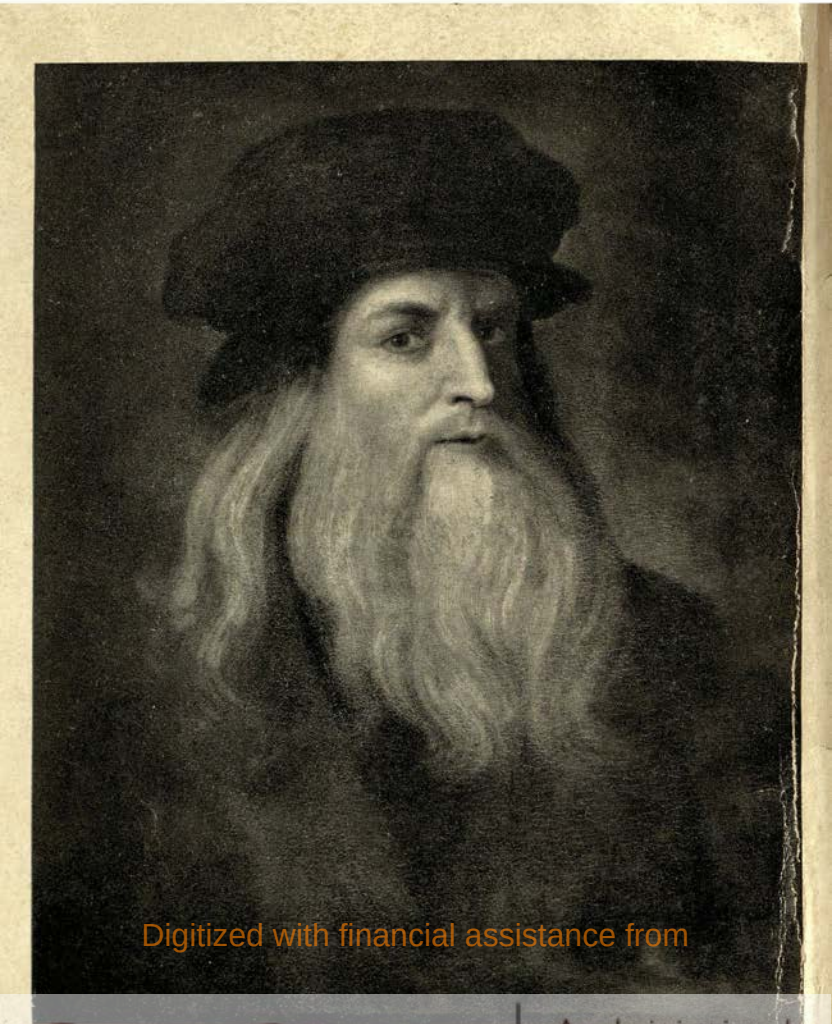

Leonardo da Vinci (by himself, Uffizi Gallery, Florence).
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The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci

By **Dmitri Merejkowski**

Author of "The Death of the Gods."

Authorised Translation from the Russian

By Herbert Trench

In Two Volumes

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A Monsieur Herbert Trench j'accorde l'autorisation *exclusive* de traduire du Russe en Anglais mon livre *La Résurrection des Dieux.*

DMITRI MEREJKOWSKI.

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LEONARDO DA VINCI

"Sentio rediit ab inferis Julianus."
(I feel that Julian has risen again.)—PETRARCH.
"We see the encounter of vast contraries: Man-god against God-man—Apollo Belvedere against Christ."—DOSTOIEVSKY.

BOOK I

THE WHITE SHE-DEVIL—1494

"At Siena was discovered another statue of Venus, to the huge joy of the inhabitants. A great concourse, with much feasting and honour, set it up over the fountain called 'Il Fonte Gaja,' as an adornment. . . .

"But great tribulation having come upon the land by reason of the Florentines, there arose one of the council, a citizen, and spake in this wise: 'Fellow-citizens, since the finding of this figure we have had much evil hap, and if we consider how strictly idolatry is prohibited by our faith, what shall we think but that God hath sent us this adversity by reason of sin? I advise that we remove this image from the public square of the city, deface it, break it in pieces, and send it to be buried in the territory of the Florentines.'

"All agreeing with this opinion, they confirmed it by a decree; and the thing was put into execution, and the statue was buried within our confines." (*Notes of the Florentine sculptor, Lorenzo Ghiberti, XVth century.*)

I

IN Florence the guild of dyers had their shops hard by the Canonica of Orsanmichele. The houses were disfigured by every sort of shed, out-house, and projection on crooked wooden supports; tiled roofs leaned so close to each other as almost to shut out the sky, and the street was dark even

in the glare of noon. In the doorways below, samples of foreign woollen-stuffs were suspended, sent to Florence to be dyed with litmus-lichen, with madder, or with woad steeped in a corrosive of Tuscan alum. The street was paved roughly, and in the kennel flowed many-coloured streams, oozings from the dye vats. Shields over the portals of the principal shops, or *Fondachi*, were blazoned with the arms of the Calimala (so the guild of dyers was named), "on a field gules, an eagle, or upon a ball of wool argent."

Within one of these *Fondachi*, among huge account-books and piles of commercial documents, sat Messer Cipriano Buonaccorsi, a worthy Florentine merchant, and Master of the Noble Guild of the Calimala.

It was a cold March evening, and damp exhaled from the choked and cumbered cellars; the old man was a-cold, and he drew his worn squirrel-mantle tightly round him. A goose-quill was stuck behind his ear, and with omniscient, though weak and myopic eyes, that seemed at once careless and attentive, he conned the parchment leaves of his ponderous ledger; debit to the left, credit to the right; divided by rectangular lines, and annotated in a round, even hand, unadorned by stops, or capitals, or Arabic numerals, which were considered frivolous innovations, impertinent in business-books. On the first page was inscribed in imposing characters: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and the most blessed Virgin Mary,

this book is begun in the year of the Lord MCCCCLXXXXIV."

Having corrected an error in the number of bales received in pledge, and satisfied himself as to the latest entries of podded pepper, Mecca ginger, and bundles of cinnamon, Messer Cipriano leaned wearily against the back of his chair, closed his eyes, and meditated upon an epistle he must indite for his emissary at the Wool Fair in Montpellier of France. Just then some one entered, and the old man raising his glance saw his *contadino*, Grillo, who rented from him certain vineyards and fields belonging to his mountain-villa of San Gervaso in the valley of the Mugnone. Grillo did obsequious reverence, tendering a basket of brown eggs, carefully packed, while at his belt clucked two fat chickens, their feet tied and their heads hanging.

"Ah, Grillo!" exclaimed Buonaccorsi, with his customary urbanity, "has the Lord been gracious to you? Meseems we have the spring season at last."

"Messer Cipriano, to us old men even the spring brings no delight. Our old bones ache worse than before and cry louder for the grave. I have brought your worship eggs and young cockerels for Easter." And he screwed up his greenish eyes, revealing innumerable small creases all round them, the effect of rude acquaintance with wind and sun. Buonaccorsi, having thanked him for the gift, turned to business.

"Well, have you the men ready at the farm? Can we get all done before daybreak?"

Grillo sighed prodigiously, and meditated, leaning heavily on his staff. "All is ready, and there are men enough. But I ask you, Messer Cipriano, were it not better we waited a little?"

"Nay, old man, you have said yourself that we must not wait, lest the matter become known."

"True. Yet the thing is terrible. It is sin. And the days now are holy-days, days of fasting; and our work is of another sort."

"Well, I will take the sin on my own soul. Fear naught; I will not betray you. Only tell me—shall we find what we seek?"

"Why should we not? We have signs to guide us. Did not our fathers know of the hill behind the mill at the Humid Hollow? And at night there 's the Jack o' Lantern over San Giovanni. That means lots of this rubbish all round. I have heard tell that not long ago, when they were digging in the vineyard at Marignola, they drew a whole devil from out the clay."

"A devil? What manner of devil?"

"A bronze one with horns. He had hairy legs —goat's legs—with hoofs. And a face which laughs. And he dances on one leg and snaps his fingers. 'T was very old; all green and crumbled."

"What did they do with it?"

"They made it into a bell for the new chapel of San Michele."

Messer Cipriano was beside himself. "Grillo, you should have told me of this before!"

"Your worship had gone to Siena."

"You should have sent after me. I would have despatched some one—I would have come myself —I would have grudged no expense—I would have cast ten bells for them in its place. The idiots! To make a Dancing Faun—perhaps a real Scopas —into a bell!"

"Ay, they showed their folly. But, Messer Cipriano, be not wroth. They are punished: for since they hung that new bell the worms have eaten the apples, and the olives have failed. And the tone of the bell is bad."

"How so?"

"That 's not for me to say. It has n't the proper note. It brings no joy to the Christian heart. Somehow it sounds unmeaning. 'T is what one might expect: one can't get a Christian bell out of a dumb devil. Be it not spoke to anger your worship, but, Messer Cipriano, the good Father is right; of all this filth they dig up, no good is going to come. We must go to work with prudence and defend ourselves with the cross and with prayers; for the Devil is subtle and powerful and the son of a dog, and he creeps in at one ear and out at the other. We were led into temptation even by that stone arm which Zaccheo found at the Hill of the Mill. 'T was the Evil One tempted us, and we came to harm by it. Lord defend us! 'T is dreadful even to remember!"

"How got you it, Grillo?"

"The thing happened last autumn on the Eve of Martinmas. We were sitting us down to sup, and the good woman had put the porridge on the table, when my nephew Zaccheo came bursting in from his digging in the field on the Hill of the Mill. 'Master! O master!' he cried, and his face was all drawn and changed, and his teeth chattered. 'The Lord be with you, my son!' says I, and he went on: 'O Lord, master! there 's a corpse creeping out from under the pots! Go yourself, master, and see.' So we crossed ourselves and we went. By this time 't was dark, and the moon was getting up behind the trees. There was the old olive-stump, and beside it where the earth was dug was some shining thing. I stooped, and saw 't was an arm, very white, and with round dainty fingers, like those of the city ladies. 'Good Lord,' thinks I, 'what sort of devilment is this?' I let down the lantern into the hole, and that arm moved and signalled to me with its finger! That was more than I could bear, and I cried out, and my knees bent under me. But Monna Bonda, my grandame, whom they call a wise woman, and who has all her life in her though she be so old, chided me, saying, 'Fool, what is it you fear? Do not your eyes tell you yon thing is neither of the living nor of the dead, but is a stone?' And she snatched at it and pulled it forth out of the earth. 'Nay, grandame,' I bade her, 'let it be; touch it not; rather let me bury it lest mischief

befall us.' 'Not so,' quoth she; 'but take we it to the church, and let the Father exorcise it.' But she deceived me, for she brought it not to the priest, but hid it in the chimney-corner, where in her cot she keeps gear of all sorts—rags, unguents, and herbals, and spells. And when I made insistence, she insisted too and kept it. And from that day 't is very certain the old beldame hath done cures of great marvel. Is it a tooth-ache? she doth but touch the cheek with the idol and the swelling is gone. She salves fevers, colics, falling sickness. If a cow is in labour and cannot bring forth, Monna Bonda touches her with that same stone hand, and the cow lows, and there 's the calf, kicking in the straw. The noise of these wonders has gone abroad, and the old woman has swelled her money-chest. But no good has come of it, for Don Faustino has not allowed me one day's peace. He speaks against me in his preaching, in church before them all. He calls me the son of perdition and the child of the Devil, and he declares he will tell of it to the bishop, and will deny me the Communion. The boys run after me in the street, and point and say, 'There goes Grillo, the sorcerer, and his grandame is a witch, and they have sold themselves to the Evil One.' Even in the night I get no rest. Meseems that stone hand rises up and lies softly on my neck, and then of a sudden takes me by the throat and would strangle me, till I essay to cry out, and cannot. 'Bad jesting, this,' I think to myself.

So at last one morning, ere it was light, the old woman having gone forth to pick her herbs, I got up and broke open her cot, and found the thing, and brought it to you. Lotto, the rag-picker, would have given me ten *soldi* for it, and of you I only had eight; but I am ready to sacrifice not only two *soldi*, but even my life for your worship. May the Lord give you His holy benediction, and to Madonna Angelica, and to your sons and your grandsons!"

"It seems, then, by what you tell me, Grillo," said Messer Cipriano thoughtfully, "that we shall have findings on that Hill of the Mill?"

"We are like enough to find," said the old man with a profound sigh; "only we may not tell Don Faustino. If he hear of it he will dress my head without a comb; and he can do your worship a mischief, too, for he can raise the people and not let you finish your work. Well, well—we must pray the Lord to show us mercy! But in the meanwhile, my honoured benefactor, do not abandon me, but say a word for me to the judge."

"What? anent the strip of land the miller would take from you?"

"That is it, master. The miller is a cunning rascal, and he knows how to catch the Devil by the tail. I, you see, gave a heifer to the judge; but the miller gave him a lined cow. I fear me the judge will decide for the miller, because the suit is not yet concluded, and already the cow has a fine bull-calf. I pr'ythee, speak for me—

father that you are to me. This which we do on the Hill of the Mill, I do only for your kindness. There is no other I would have let bring such a sin upon my conscience."

"Be at ease, Grillo. I will speak for you; the judge is my friend. Now take your steps to the kitchen, and eat and drink. To-night we will go together to San Gervaso."

The old man, with many reverences, went out, and Messer Cipriano betook himself to his little chamber near the storehouse. It was a museum of marbles and bronzes, hung on walls, arranged on benches. Medals and old coins were assorted on cloth-covered benches; and fragments of statues, not yet pieced together, were waiting in huge cases. Through his trade-agents in many countries he procured antiquities from all classic grounds: from Athens, Smyrna, Halicarnassus, Cyprus, Leucosia, Rhodes, from the remoter Egypt, from the heart of the Levant. The Master of the Guild of the Calimala glanced over his treasures, and then sank into profound consideration of customs-dues on the import of fleeces; and finally composed the letter to his factor at the Wool Fair in Montpellier.

II

Meantime, in the hinder-part of the warehouse, heaped with bales, and lighted only by the glimmer of a lamp before the image of the Madonna, three

lads, Dolfo, Antonio, and Giovanni were gossiping together. Dolfo, Messer Buonaccorsi's clerk, a red-haired, snub-nosed, good-natured youth, was entering the number of ells of cloth which Antonio da Vinci, old for his years, with glassy eyes and thin, rough, black locks, was rapidly measuring with the Florentine measure, called a *canna:* Giovanni Boltraffio, a student of painting from Milan, a big boy of nineteen, but shy and awkward, with innocent, sad, grey eyes, and an irresolute expression, was sitting cross-legged on a made-up bale, and listening with all his ears.

"This is what we have come to," cried Antonio excitedly; "digging heathen gods out of the ground!" Then he added, dictating to Dolfo, "Of brown Scotch faced-cloth, 32 *braccia,*[1] 6 fingers, 8 nails." Then, having folded the measured piece, he threw it into its place, and raising his finger with the gesture of a menacing prophet, in imitation of Fra Girolamo Savonarola, he cried, "*Gladius Dei super terram cito et velociter!* In the island of Patmos San Giovanni had a vision: he saw the angel lay hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and bind him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years should be fulfilled. To-day Satan has been released from his prison; to-day

[1] *Braccio,* a measure considerably less than a metre, still in use in Florence.

the thousand years are at an end; the false gods, forerunners and followers of Antichrist, are creeping forth from under the seal of the angel back into the world for the temptation of men! Woe to those who live on the earth or on the sea!—Of thin, yellow, Brabant cloth, 17 *braccia*, 4 fingers, 9 nails!"

"How think you, then, Antonio?" asked Giovanni, with alarmed and eager interest; "all these signs bear witness——"

"Ay, ay! You see, the hour has come. Not alone are they digging up the old gods, but they are creating new ones in their likeness. Painters and sculptors alike weary themselves in the service of Moloch—that is, the Devil. They turn the house of God into the temple of Satan; in the sacred pictures, under the guise of martyrs and saints, they paint the gods of uncleanness, and to these the people pray; in place of John the Baptist they give us Bacchus; for the holy Mother of God we get the shameless Venus. The pictures should be burned with fire, and their ashes strewn upon the wind!"

Suppressed fire flashed from the dull, dark eyes of the zealous clerk; and Giovanni, not daring a retort, held his peace. His delicate, childlike eyebrows contracted under the stress of thought. At last, however, he said: "Antonio, they tell me Messer Leonardo, your kinsman, takes scholars into his painting-room. I have long wished——"

Antonio frowned and interrupted him. "If

you would lose your soul, Giovanni, then go to Messer Leonardo!"

"What? Why?"

"Though he be my near kinsman, and though he have lived twenty years longer than I, nevertheless in the Scripture it is written: 'From an heretic, after the first and second admonition, turn thou away.' Leonardo is a heretic and an infidel. His mind is darkened by Satanic pride; he seeks to penetrate into the mysteries of nature by steeping himself in mathematics and black magic." Then, raising his eyes to heaven, he repeated from Savonarola's latest discourse: "'The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. We know them, these learned men; they all go to the house of the devil.'"

"And have you heard, Antonio," persisted Giovanni, still shyly, "that Messer Leonardo is here in Florence? He has even now arrived from Milan."

"For what purpose?"

"The Duke has sent him to buy, if possible, pictures from the galleries of the late Lorenzo the Magnificent."

"Well, if he be here, then here he is. 'T is of no moment to me," said Antonio, turning away; and he proceeded to measure a length of green cloth with his *canna*.

From the church, bells rang out the call to vespers, and Dolfo stretched himself and clapped-to the ledger with an air of relief; for this day

Lorenzo the Magnificent. By Vasari.

Photo by Brogi.

work was over, and the shops and the warehouses were shutting.

Giovanni stepped into the street. A narrow strip of grey sky, faintly tinged with the roseate of evening, showed between the humid roofs; a fine rain fell through the windless air. Suddenly from a window in a neighbouring alley was wafted a song:

"O vaghe montanine pastorelle
Donde venite si leggiadre e belle?"

(O shepherd-girls so fair;
Say from what mountain air
Light-footed have ye strayed?)

The voice was resonant and young: from the measured beat of the treadle Giovanni guessed at a loom, and at a girl singing as she threw the shuttle. He listened with vague enjoyment, and remembered that the spring had come, and felt his heart swelling with strange emotions of tenderness and melancholy.

"Nanna! Nanna! Where hast thou got to, thou little devil? What hath happened to thine ears? Haste thee! The vermicelli grows cold." After which there was a swift clapping of wooden pattens across the floor, and then silence.

Giovanni stood long, his eyes on the window, the gay song echoing in his ears like the far-off beatings of some shepherd's pipe—

"O vaghe montanine pastorelle——"

Then sighing softly to himself he entered the house of the Master of the Calimala, and mounting the winding stair, with its worm-eaten banisters, he presented himself in the great room, which served as a library, and in which, bending over a desk, was Giorgio Merula, the historiographer of the Court of the Duke of Milan.

III

Merula had come to Florence on a mission from his lord, to purchase rare books from the library of the great Lorenzo. He was lodged in the house of Buonaccorsi, as great an enthusiast as himself for the learning and the arts of the ancients. Journeying to Florence he had fallen into an acquaintance with Giovanni Boltraffio at a road-side inn, and under the pretext that he required an amanuensis, he had brought him in his company to Messer Cipriano's house.

When Boltraffio entered, Merula was in the act of examining with reverent attention a much-worn volume, which had the appearance of a Missal or a Psaltery. He gingerly passed a damp sponge over the parchment—parchment of the most delicate kind, made from the skin of a still-born lamb; here and there he rubbed it with pumice-stone, smoothed it with the blade of a knife and with a polisher; then holding it up to the light, studied it afresh.

"Dainty darlings!" he murmured, sucking in

his lips with delight; "come forth to the light of heaven! Ah, how many and how beautiful ye are!"

He raised his bald head from his work and showed a bloated, red-nosed countenance, mobile brows, and eyes small and colourless, but brimming with vivacity; poured wine into a cup beside him on the window-sill, drank it, coughed, and was returning to his work when he caught sight of Giovanni.

"Ha, little monk!" he called out merrily. "You have been lacking to me: 'Where can my little monk be gone?' quoth I. 'Fallen in love, of a surety, with one of the fair maids of Florence.' Fair enough, I warrant you, and falling in love is no sin. Nor have I been wasting my time neither. You never have seen such a pretty piece in your life. Will you have me show her to you? Not I; for you 'll be whispering the thing to the four winds! And to think I bought her for a song from a Hebrew rag-vendor! Well, well, I suppose I must show you; you only!" And beckoning mysteriously he whispered, "Come here with you—closer—here!"

And he pointed to a page closely covered with the angular characters of ecclesiastical writing: praises of the Virgin, psalms, prayers, interspersed with huge musical notation. Then he opened the book at another page, and raised it to the light on a level with Giovanni's eyes; the boy noticed that where Merula had scraped away the ecclesi-

astical writing there emerged other characters—barely distinguishable—not letters, but the ghosts of letters, pallid, attenuated, faint, still lingering impressed upon the parchment.

"See you? See you?" cried Merula, triumphantly; "is it not a darling? Did I not tell you, little brother, 't was a pretty piece!"

"But what is it?" asked Giovanni, astounded.

"That 's what I can't yet tell you. Fragments of an antique anthology; new riches it may be of the Hellenic muse. And, perchance, but for me they would never have come out into God's light—would have been entombed to the end of time under antiphons and psalms of penitence!" And Merula explained to his pupil how some Middle Age, monkish copyist, wishing to use the precious parchment, had expunged, as he thought, the old Pagan writing, and scrawled his pieties over it. As the old man spoke, the sun filled the room with its slowly dying, evening red; in this last radiance the shade of the antique letters, the ghost of the ancient writing, showed itself with redoubled clearness.

"You see! you see!" cried Merula in an ecstasy. "The dead are rising from their age-long sepulchres! It is a hymn to the Olympian gods! Already you can decipher the first lines!"

And translating from the Greek, he read:

"Glory to the gentle, the richly-crowned Dionysus,
Glory to thee, far-darting Phœbus, silver-bowed, terrible,

God of the flowing curls, slayer of the sons of Niobe——"

And here is a hymn to that Venus, of whom you, little monk, have such a mighty dread:

"Glory to thee, golden-limbed mother, Aphrodite,
Delight of the gods and of mortals."

But here the verses broke off, hidden under the pious overwriting. Giovanni lowered the book, and at once the traces of the old Greek letters grew faint and confused, sinking into the yellow smoothness of the parchment. Nothing was visible but the clear, black, greasy characters of the monkish scribe, the penitential psalm, and the huge square notes for the chant:

"Give ear to my prayer, O God, and hide not thyself from my supplication. My heart is sore pained within me, and the terrors of death are fallen upon me."

The roseate reflection faded away, and darkness filled the room. Merula poured wine from the earthen pitcher, drank, and offered it to his companion.

"To my health, boy. *Vinum super omnia bonum diligamus!* You refuse? Well, well! as you will. I will drink for you. But what is ill with you, little monk? You are as green as if you were drowning. Has that bigot of an Antonio been scaring you with his prophesyings?

Spit on them, Giovanni, spit on them! A pox upon all these croakings of ill-voiced ravens! Confess now, you have been with Antonio?"

"Ay."

"And of what did he speak?"

"Of Antichrist, and of Messer Leonardo da Vinci."

"So I thought! You have no speech but of Leonardo! Has he bewitched you, simpleton? Hear me now, lad; remove that folly out of your head, and content you as my secretary. I will show you the world; teach you grammar, law; make you an orator and a Court poet. There's the road to riches and fame. Painting! what rubbish is that? Seneca called it a trade—no business for a free man. Turn your eyes upon the artists; are they not all ignorant, rude persons——"

"Nay, I have been told Messer Leonardo is a great scholar."

"You tell me news. Where is his Latin, pr'ythee? He confounds Cicero and Quintilian, and has not even a smack of Greek about him. A scholar you call him, do you?"

"But," urged Boltraffio, "he has made wondrous machines; and his studies of the phenomena of nature——"

"Machines! pf—f! Studies of nature! How far is that going to take you? In my *Elegantiæ Linguæ Latinæ* I have culled more than two thousand turns of speech; on my soul, new, and

elegance itself. Would you know how much it cost me? But to apply wheels to machinery, and to watch the manner of the flying of birds and the sprouting of the grass in the fields—call you that learning? 'T is the idleness, the vain toying of babes."

The old man paused: his face had grown stern. Then taking his young friend by the arm, he continued with gravity:

"Hearken, Giovanni; and what I say to you burn it deep into your mind. Our teachers are the Greeks and the Romans; they have done all that the mind of man can do upon this earth. For us there is nothing left but to follow in their footsteps: is it not written, 'The disciple is not greater than his lord'?" He lifted his wine, and looking straight into Giovanni's eyes with malicious mirth, all his lines and wrinkles dissolving in one broad smile, he added:

"O youth! youth! I look upon you, little monk, and I envy you. You are a bud blowing in the spring, that is what you are. And you, simpleton, contemn women, and scorn wine, and would make of yourself a hermit and a recluse. For all that, you have a little devil there in your heart; oh, I read you well enough, my friend, through and through to your very soul! Some day that little devil will peep out; it is vain for you to deny it. However glum you may be, there are who will be merry in your company. See, Giovanni, *carino*, you 're this parchment—peni-

tential psalms outside, and under them a hymn to Aphrodite!"

"Messer Giorgio," said Giovanni, "it grows dark; were it not well I brought the lights?"

"Why this haste, lad? It pleases me to converse in the twilight, and to recall my lost youth." His tongue had grown stammering and his phrases less perspicuous. "I know," he muttered, "that you are gazing at me, and thinking, 'He is drunk, the old rascal, and talking his folly.' Yet I have that here within me," and he tapped his bald forehead complacently and nodded. "I speak not for boasting," he went on, "but inquire of the scholars whether any have ever surpassed Merula in the elegance of his Latin. Who was it who discovered Martial? Who read the famed inscription on the gate of Tibur? That meant climbing till your head reeled, stones breaking from under your feet, as you clung to a bunch of twigs and thought to fall headlong. Whole days under the blazing sun, just to read and to copy those few ancient letters! And the peasant maids as they passed would cry to each other, 'See yon fat quail up there seeking a nesting place!' And I would answer them with some gallantry, and when they had passed by would set me to my work again. Once, concealed under the ivy and the thorns, where the stones had fallen in ruin, I found these two sole words, *'Gloria Romanorum!'*" And as if listening to the echo of majestic utterance too long silenced, Merula repeated in low, awe-

Drawing of Flowers (Leonardo da Vinci, Windsor).

Photo by Mansell.

struck tones, "'*Gloria Romanorum!*'—Glory of the Romans!"

But then, with an uncertain wave of the hand, he added, "By my troth! 't is something to remember, even though the past returns no more." And raising his glass, he sang hoarsely the students' drinking-song:

"Not a single jot miss I,
Not a single drop, Sir!
All my life to the cask I go,
And by the cask I 'll stop, Sir.
Wine I love and singing to 't,
And the Latin Graces;
If I drink my throat 'll do 't
Better than Horatius.
Vintage spins our brains about
Dum vinum potamus;
Lads, to Bacchus let us shout,
Te Deum laudamus!"

He fell a-coughing and was unable to finish. By this time it was dark, and Giovanni could barely see his master's face. Outside it was still raining, and the swollen and frequent drops plashed noisily in the streaming court-yard below.

"Hear me, little monk," stuttered Merula; "what was it I was saying? My wife is a handsome woman—no—that was n't it. Have patience. Yes, I have it now. You know the line: '*Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento.*' Ah! [they were the giants, the lords of the universe!" Here

his voice shook, and Giovanni saw tears in his eyes. "I repeat, giants. While to-day—it is a scandal to speak it! But let us take this duke of ours, Ludovico Il Moro, Duke of Milan. True it is I am paid by him, am writing his history, am a sort of Titus Livius, and am comparing the cowardly hare, the man of straw, to Pompey and to Cæsar; but in my soul, Giovanni, in my soul—" He stopped, and glanced at the door with the suspiciousness of a practised courtier; then bending closer to his companion, he whispered, "In the soul of old Merula the love of liberty is not dead, and will never die. Repeat it not, but I tell you our times are evil, evil as never before. And the men! it sickens me to see them; rotten! mere clods of earth! And they curl up their noses, and think themselves as the ancients. I would fain know what they are so proud of. Hearken; an acquaintance of mine writes to me, from Greece, that not many weeks ago in the island of Chios the convent washerwomen, as they were beating the linen at dawn, found on the seashore—a god! a real ancient god; a Triton with his fishy-tail, and fins, and scales. The silly fools were affrighted and fled, thinking it the Devil. But when they saw him weak and old, and it would seem sick, lying on his belly on the sand, and warming his green scales in the sun, his hair grey, and his eyes dim as those of a sucking babe, then they took courage, the cowardly wretches! and came around him showering him with Christian prayers, and

beat him to death like a dog; he, the ancient deity, last of the mighty gods of the ocean; it might be a scion of Poseidon himself!"

And the old man shook his head sorrowfully, and maudlin tears rolled down his cheeks as he thought of the sea-monster done to death by Christian laundresses. A servant entered bearing a candle and closed the shutters; with the darkness the pagan phantoms shrank away and vanished. The pair were called to supper, but Merula was so heavy with wine that they had to carry him to bed.

It was long before Boltraffio slept, and as he listened to the peaceful snores of Messer Giorgio, he thought, as usual, of Leonardo da Vinci.

IV

Giovanni had been sent to Florence by his uncle, Oswald Ingrim, the painter on glass (*magister a vitreis*), a German from Grätz, and pupil of Johann Kirchheim, the famous Strasburg master. He was to buy certain transparent and brilliant pigments which could be obtained only in the Tuscan city, and were required by Ingrim for his work in Milan Cathedral. The boy was the natural son of Reinold the lapidary, Oswald's brother, and had got the name of Boltraffio from his Lombard mother, whom Oswald asserted to be a shameless woman and the cause of his brother's ruin. Brought up by his crabbed uncle, Giovanni

was a lonely and frightened child, reared on tales of unclean powers, demons, hags, sorcerers, and werewolves. His special horror was a certain demon which, according to the North Italian tradition, appeared under the form of a woman, and was called the "White She-Devil," or the "Mother of the Snowy Eyebrow." Yet even in his earliest infancy, when his uncle would silence his sobs with threats of the *Diavolessa bianca*, the child felt a curiosity mingling with his terror, a shrinking wish that some day he might meet the white one face to face, and behold her countenance with his own eyes.

When the boy was grown, Ingrim handed him over as pupil to Fra Benedetto, the sacred painter. This was a kind and simple-minded old man, who taught that the first step in beginning a picture was to invoke God Omnipotent and the beloved Virgin, St. Luke the first Christian painter, and all the saints in Paradise; the second, to put on the cloak of charity, fear, patience, and obedience; the last, to temper his colours with yelk of egg, and the juice from young fig-branches mixed with wine, and to prepare his panels of old beech-wood by rubbing them with the ashes of bones—if possible the wing bones of capons. His precepts were endless and minute: Giovanni soon learned the contemptuous phrase with which he dismissed the colour known as Dragon's Blood. "Let it lie; 't will bring you no credit," and Giovanni surmised that the same words had been said

by Fra Benedetto's teacher, and by the teacher of his teacher before him. Constant was the smile of quiet pride with which Benedetto initiated his pupil into the secrets of his art. For instance, in the painting of youthful faces the eggs of urban hens were essential: the rural hen laying an egg with a ruddy yelk only suited for the delineation of countenances wrinkled and swarthy. Notwithstanding these subtleties, Fra Benedetto was a painter simple and innocent as a child: he prepared himself for work by fast and vigil; each time he depicted the Crucifixion his face was bathed in tears.

Giovanni loved his master, and had considered him the first of painters; this opinion had, however, been shaken of late. Fra Benedetto, expounding his one anatomical rule, viz., that the length of a man's body must be reckoned at eight faces and two-thirds, was used to add in the same perfunctory tone in which he spoke of Dragon's Blood: "As for the bodies of women, we will not allude to them, for they have no proportions." This dogma was as much an article of faith with him as these others: that all fish are dark-coloured above and bright below; or that men's ribs are fewer than women's by reason of God's method in the creation of Eve. For an allegorical representation of the elements, he drew a mole to signify earth; a fish, water; a salamander, fire; a chameleon, air; but, supposing the word "chameleon" an augmentative of "camel," the simple

monk showed the fluid element as a colossal camel, its jaws gaping alarmingly in its efforts to breathe. Nor were his remaining notions more accurate. Doubts therefore crept into Giovanni's mind, and a mutinous spirit, which Fra Benedetto called "the devil of worldly knowledge." When, shortly before his journey to Florence, the lad chanced to see certain drawings of Leonardo da Vinci's, his doubts grew with such rapidity that he was no longer able to stifle them.

To-night, here in the Tuscan city, as he lay beside the peacefully-snoring Messer Giorgio, he turned all this over in his mind for the thousandth time; but the more he thought the more puzzled he became. Then he resolved to invoke celestial aid, and full of hope, raising his eyes to the impenetrable darkness of night, he prayed thus:

"Lord, help me and forsake me not. If Messer Leonardo be truly a godless man, in whose skill lieth temptation and sin, rid me of the thought of him; purge my mind of the memory of his drawings, and deliver me from evil. But if, while pleasing Thee and glorifying Thy name in the noble art of painting, it be yet possible to know all which is hidden from Fra Benedetto, and which I am so fain to learn (such as anatomy, perspective, and the laws of light and shade), then, O God, make strong my will, and lighten my eyes, that I may doubt no more; and permit that Messer Leonardo may receive me into his studio, and that Fra Benedetto may grant me his pardon,

and may know that I am in nowise guilty in Thy sight."

After this fervent prayer, Giovanni felt a balsam descend upon his heart; little by little confusion came upon his thoughts; he fancied himself back with his uncle, the glass-worker, and listening to the hissing of the glass as the white-hot steel was plunged into it. He saw the twisting of the leaden ribbons, which form the frames for the several pieces of coloured glass; he heard the voice of Oswald commanding more notches at the edge of the lead for the fixing of the glass; then all vanished: he rolled to his other side and slept.

And a vision came to him, which in after years he often recalled to mind. For he saw himself standing in the gloom of a vast cathedral, and before a many-coloured Gothic window. On it was depicted the vintage of that mystic vine whereof the Saviour had said, "My Father is the husbandman." The naked body of the Crucified lay in the winepress, blood flowing from His wounds. Popes, cardinals, emperors were receiving it into vats and casks. The Apostles were throwing in grapes; St. Peter was treading them. In the background, prophets and patriarchs were trenching the vineyard and pruning the vines. A waggon was passing, drawn by the lion, the bull, and the eagle, driven by St. Matthew.

Such painted allegories Giovanni had seen in his uncle's workshop; nowhere such colours, dark,

yet with the gleam of jewels. Chiefly he marvelled at the crimson of the Saviour's blood. From the depths of the cathedral came the faint echoing of his favourite chant:

"O fior di castitate,
Odorifero giglio
Con gran suavitate
Sei di color vermiglio."

But the song died away, the window glowed no longer, and the harsh voice of Antonio da Vinci shouted in his ear:

"Flee! Flee for your life! *She* cometh!"

Nor did he need to inquire who, for he knew the *Diavolessa bianca* was behind him. A waft of icy air; and then a heavy hand, not human, had taken hold at his throat, and was choking him. He seemed to be dying, cried out, and awoke—to see Messer Giorgio standing by his side and dragging away the coverlet.

"Eh! pull yourself from your bed or they will depart without us. Arise! the hour is already past," cried the antiquarian.

"What! Whither?" stammered Giovanni, half-asleep.

"Whither? Can you forget? To the villa of San Gervaso, to dig at the Hill of the Mill."

"I go not thither."

"You go not? What have I waked you for? Why have I bidden them saddle the black mule that the two of us may travel at ease? A truce

to this stubbornness. Get up! Get up! Nay, then, a word in your ear, Giovannino: Messer Leonardo will be there."

Giovanni leaped to his feet, and without another word threw on his clothes.

Presently they were in the court-yard, where all was ready for the start. Grillo was running hither and thither advising and directing. At last they set out. Other friends of Cipriano's, and among them Leonardo da Vinci, were to meet them later, by another path to San Gervaso.

V

The rain was over, and the north wind had banished the clouds. Stars scintillated in the moonless heaven, like little wind-blown lamps. Resin-torches flared and fluttered, scattering sparks. The horsemen took their way by the Via Ricasoli, past San Marco and the serrated gate of San Gallo. Here the sentinels argued and swore, but were too sleepy to perceive what was on foot; and presently egress was secured by a good bribe. Outside the gate, the road followed the deep and narrow valley of the Mugnone. After passing several meagre villages, where the streets were even narrower than those in Florence, and the rough stone houses were as tall as fortresses, the party emerged into an olive-grove owned by the *contadini* of San Gervaso. Dismounting at the junction of two roads, they walked to the

Hill of the Mill, hard by Messer Cipriano's vineyard. Here men awaited them with spades and mattocks; and here, behind the hill, beyond the marsh known as the Humid Hollow, the villa walls showed shadowy white through the darkness of the trees. Tall cypresses stood up black from the summit of the hill, and down below on the Mugnone was the name-giving watermill.

Grillo signified where, to his thinking, they ought to dig; Merula suggested another place; and Strocco, the gardener, swore they must go lower down, much nearer to the Humid Hollow, because the devils always hide themselves nearest to the slough. Cipriano, however, bade dig where Grillo advised; the spades grated, and soon there was an odour of new-dug earth. Giovanni shuddered, for a bat had brushed his face with its weird pinions; but Merula clapped him on the shoulder, crying, "Fear nothing, little monk! we shall find no devil here. This Grillo is an ass. Thank heaven, it 's not the sort of excavation I 'm used to. At Rome, in the 45th Olympiad" (Merula scorned the Christian calendar), "in the days of Pope Innocent VIII., diggers from Lombardy, who were working on the Appian Way close to the tomb of Cæcilia Metella, found an ancient sarcophagus with the inscription, 'Julia, daughter of Claudius,' and in it a body clothed in wax—a fair maid of fifteen, with the semblance of one asleep. You would have sworn she breathed: the flush of life was on her cheek. Multitudes

flocked to the tomb and refused to leave it; for such was Julia's beauty, as to be incredible to those who had not beheld it. But it ill-suited the Pope that his children should adore a dead heathen, and he caused the body to be interred secretly under the Pincian Hill. Do you take me, lad? That was something like excavating!"

And Merula contemptuously kicked the clods which the diggers were throwing up at his feet. Suddenly all the onlookers started, for a jarring sound had come from one of the spades.

"Bones!" said the gardener; "the ancient burying-place was here."

At this moment the long-drawn howl of a dog was heard from San Gervaso, and Giovanni thought, "We are profaning a grave. May it prove nothing worse!"

"Bones of a horse!" cried Strocco contemptuously, and dragged out a mouldered, long-shaped skull.

"Grillo," said Messer Cipriano anxiously, "were it not better we tried elsewhere?"

"Did I not say so?" cried Merula; and taking two of the workmen with him he began new operations at the base of the hill. Strocco also had detached a party to dig in the Humid Hollow.

Presently excited shouts were heard from Messer Giorgio.

"Hither all ye simpletons! Did not I know where ye should dig?"

All ran to his side; but again the treasure

proved naught; the great man's marble fragment was only an ordinary stone. They had all deserted Grillo, who, openly humiliated, was digging alone by the light of a broken lantern.

The wind had fallen and the air grew warmer: out of the Humid Hollow exhaled a mist. The breath of primroses and violets mingled with the dankness of stagnant water. Dawn was in the sky, and the cocks crowed for the second time, signal of the departing of night.

Suddenly from the depths of the pit in which Grillo was concealed there arose a despairing yell.

"Help! Help! I am falling! The ground has given way!"

His lantern was extinguished, and at first nothing could be seen. He was heard struggling and panting, groaning and moaning. Lights were fetched, and disclosed the roof of a subterranean vault broken through by Grillo's weight. Two lads crept into the hole.

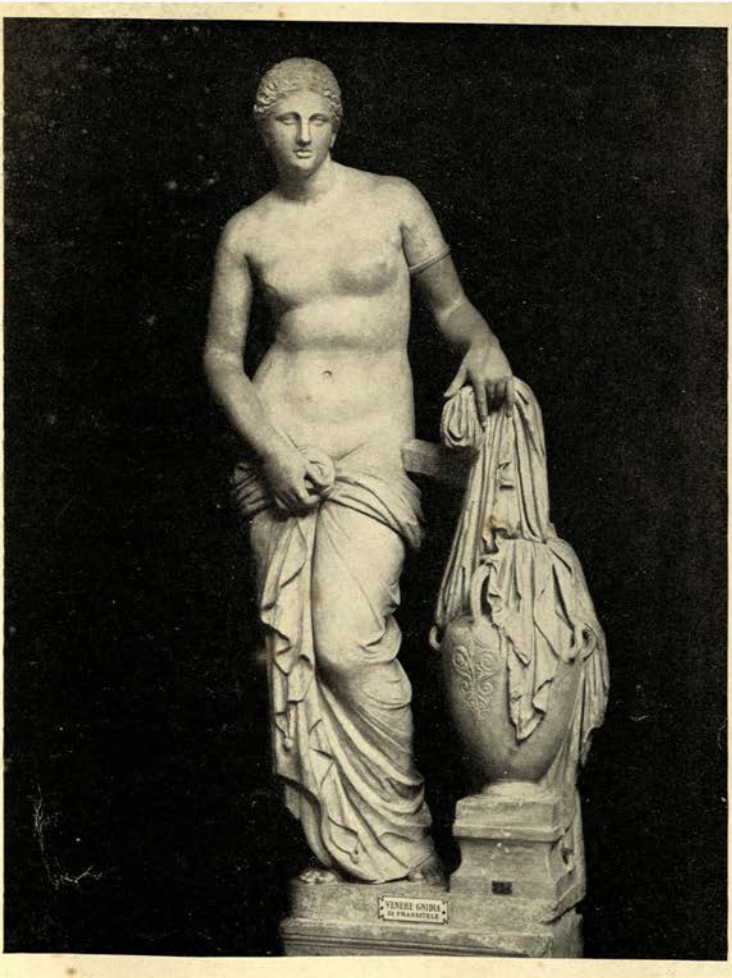
"Eh, Grillo! Where are you? Give us your hand! or are you buried alive, poor fool?"

But Grillo seemed to have lost his voice. Heedless of a sprained arm, he dragged himself along, kicking and struggling most strangely. At last he burst into an ecstasy:

"An idol! An idol! Hasten, Messer Cipriano! 't is a magnificent idol!"

"Idiot," said Strocco, "you have got the head of another horse."

"I tell you, No! There is but a hand missing.



Venus of Praxiteles. In the Vatican, Rome.

Photo by Anderson.

The rest is perfect—feet, head, shoulders!" shouted Grillo beside himself.

Then the labourers descended into the pit, carefully turning over the brickwork ruins. Giovanni, stretched on the ground, looked down into the vault, from which came the chill of a grave, and the mouldy breath of long-covered damp.

Messer Cipriano bade the men stand aside, and Giovanni could see in the profundity between the walls of ancient red brick, a white and naked body which lay like a corpse upon a bier, yet in the flaring of the torchlight seemed rosy and warm with life.

"Venus!" cried Messer Giorgio. "As I live, the Venus of Praxiteles! I cry you honour, friend Cipriano! Not the dukedoms of Milan or Genoa could bring you greater felicity!"

As for Grillo, they dug him out; and though his face was clotted with blood, and his arm had swelled into uselessness, in his old eyes shone the pride of a conqueror.

"Grillo! friend! beloved! benefactor! And I scorned you for a fool: and you—you are the cleverest of men!" cried Messer Giorgio, and falling into his arms he kissed him with deep emotion.

"Once," he continued garrulously, "Filippo Brunelleschi found a Hermes in just such a vault under his own house. Doubtless the pagans, knowing the value of these statues, hid them

from the fury of the Christians, who were exterminating the old worship."

Grillo listened, smiling beatifically, inattentive to the pipe of the shepherd and the bleating of sheep. He saw not that the sky shone now with a white and watery brilliance, nor knew that from Florence the belfries were exchanging their morning salutation.

"Gently! gently! To the right there! So! Keep it out from the wall!" cried Messer Cipriano. "Five silver pieces to each, if you can get it out without breakage."

By this time the stars had all disappeared with the exception of the orb of Venus, which still sparkled like a diamond in the glow of day. And slowly, slowly, with her ineffable smile, the goddess herself arose—as once she had risen from the foam of the sea, so now she ascended from her millennial tomb in the darkness of the earth:

> "Glory to thee, golden-limbed Aphrodite,
> Delight of the gods and of mortals . . ."

declaimed Merula.

But Giovanni saw her face blanched in the illumination of the white sunlight; and himself paling with terror, the boy murmured, "*La Diavolessa bianca!*"

He rose up and would have fled; but wonder overcame his fear. Not though he had known himself guilty of the mortal sin which is punished with eternal fire, could he have torn his gaze

from that chaste and naked body, from that countenance flaming with the effulgence of beauty. Never in the days when Aphrodite was queen of the world had any worshipped her with devouter trembling.

VI

Suddenly from the little church of San Gervaso the bells rang out, and the whole company turned and involuntarily paused in their work, for in the morning stillness the sound seemed irate and menacing.

"Lord have mercy on our souls!" murmured Grillo, putting his hand to his head with a despairing gesture. "Here is Don Faustino, and a multitude with him! They have seen us! Look how they beat their hands and beckon. See, they rush upon us! I am a lost man!"

At this moment arrived those friends of Messer Cipriano, who had intended to have been present for the excavation, but who had lost their way. Boltraffio threw a glance at them, and, absorbed though he still was in the new-found goddess, his attention was caught on the instant by one of the newcomers. This personage was already inspecting the Venus, with a cold, imperturbable composure, so different from Giovanni's personal agitation that the lad could not but be struck with astonishment. He continued to gaze at the statue, but his consciousness now was entirely for the man by his side.

"Hearken!" said Messer Cipriano after a few moments' thought, "the villa is not two paces distant, and the doors are strong enough for a siege."

"Yea, verily," cried Grillo; "courage, brothers, we shall save her!" He felt jealous for the image which had cost him so much, and directing the operations himself, he contrived to get it safely transported across the Humid Hollow. Then the statue was borne into the house; but scarcely had it crossed the threshold, when on the hill-top appeared the threatening figure, inflamed countenance, and brandished arms of Don Faustino.

The lower part of the villa was at present uninhabited, and its great hall was used as a storehouse for agricultural implements and great jars of olive-oil: in one corner was a mountain of golden straw. Upon this straw, a humble, rustic bed, Aphrodite was delicately laid to rest. But this was no sooner accomplished and the doors barred than the latter were assailed by blows, by shouts, and by curses loud and deep.

"Open! Open!" cried the cracked voice of Don Faustino; "in the name of the true and living God, I bid you open!"

Messer Cipriano mounted the stone inner staircase and surveyed the crowd from a grated window above the hall. Seeing that the assailants were few, he entered into parley, his face wearing its customary smile. But the priest put his fingers in his ears, and vociferously demanded the

idol—so he named it—which had been dug out of the ground.

The Master of the Calimala now had recourse to a *ruse de guerre.*

"Beware," he said calmly; "I have summoned the captain of the town guard, and in two hours the horsemen will be on you. I allow none to enter my house by force."

"Break down the door," cried the priest. "God is with us. Fear nothing! Assault!" And snatching an axe from a gentle-faced old peasant beside him, he battered upon the great door with all his strength.

"Don Faustino! Don Faustino!" cried the old man, feebly restraining the furious ecclesiastic, "we are poor folk, and we do not dig up money in our fields. This will be our ruin; they will have us to prison!"

The mention of the redoubtable town guard had struck terror into the rabble; and many were already deserting.

"If it had been on the church-ground, 't were another matter," muttered some of them.

"The confines established by law——"

"The law? A spider's web, set to catch flies, not hornets. The law does not exist for great folk."

"True for you. And every man is master on his own land."

All this time Giovanni was gazing at the rescued Venus.

The sunshine pouring through a side window seemed waking the tender body to warmth and softness after its long imprisonment in the gloom and the chill of the vault; the golden straw surrounding it shone like an aureole.

Giovanni once more noted the stranger. He was on his knees beside the statue, measuring it with his compasses, his square, and a half-circle made of copper; on his face was the same imperturbable calm; in his cold, blue eyes the same piercing curiosity.

"What is he doing? Who is he?" Giovanni asked himself, almost awestruck, as he watched the quick, bold fingers exploring the limbs of the goddess, the secrets of her beauty, all the subtleties of the marble, too delicate for the apprehension of the eye.

At the gate of the villa the priest was still heard yelling at the melting crowd.

"Stay, rascals! Sellers of Christ! fearful of the town guard, but careless of Antichrist! *Ipse vero Antichristus opes malorum effodiet et exponet*, as said the great preacher St. Anselm of Canterbury. *Effodiet*, hear you? Antichrist shall dig up the old idols from the earth and again bring them forth to the world."

But none heeded him.

"He is a pestilent fellow, this Don Faustino of ours!" said the prudent miller shaking his head; "his life hangs by a thread, yet see how he storms. For my part, I rejoice they have found the treasure."

"They say the image is of silver."

"Silver? Nay, I saw it myself, and 't is of marble; naked and shameless."

"Lord forgive us! Are we to soil our hands for such rubbish as that?"

"Whither art going, Zacchello?"

"To the field; to my work."

"God go with you! And I 'll to the vineyard."

At this all the fury of the priest was let loose on his parishioners.

"Infidel dogs, abortions of Cain! would you abandon your pastor? Know ye not, spawn of Satan, that did I not pray for you day and night, and beat my breast with weeping and fasting, your whole sinful village would long ere this have been sunk into the earth? But it is ended! I leave you, shaking off the dust from my feet. Cursed be the land! Cursed the corn and the water and the flocks; and your sons and your sons' sons. I am your father, your shepherd no more. I renounce you! Anathema!"

VII

In the restored calm of the villa, where the goddess lay on her golden bed, Giorgio Merula went up to the stranger who was still measuring.

"You are studying the proportions of divinity?" said the scholar patronisingly. "You would reduce beauty to mathematics?"

The other raised his eyes for an instant; then

silently, as if he had not heard the question, continued his work. The compasses contracted and expanded, describing geometrical figures; quietly and firmly the stranger put the angle measure to the fair lips of Aphrodite—lips whose smile had struck terror into Giovanni's heart—reckoned the result, and set it in a note-book.

"Pardon my curiosity," insisted Merula, "how many divisions are there?"

"This is a rough measurement," said the unknown, unwillingly; "generally I divide the human face into degrees, minutes, seconds, and thirds, each division being the twelfth part of the preceding one."

"Say you so?" cried Merula, "meseems the last subdivision must be less than the finest hair."

"A third," explained the other still grudgingly, "is $\frac{1}{4\,8\,8\,3\,3}$ of the whole face."

Merula lifted his eyebrows with an incredulous smile. "Well, we live and learn. I never thought it were possible to reach such accuracy."

"The more accurate the better," returned his companion.

"Truly it may be so; yet, you know, in Art, in Beauty, all these mathematical calculations—What artist in the glow of enthusiasm, of fiery inspiration, breathed upon by God——"

"Yes, yes," assented the unknown, evidently wearied; "none the less I am anxious to know——"

And stooping he measured the distance from the roots of the hair to the chin.

"To know?" thought Giovanni. "Can one *know* these matters? Folly! Does he not *feel*—understand?"

Merula, anxious to probe the other to the quick, talked on of the ancients, and how they should be imitated. The stranger waited till he had concluded, then said, smiling into his long golden beard:

"He who can drink from the fountain will not drink from the cup."

"By your leave!" shouted the scholar, "if you call the ancients a cup, whom do you call the fountain?"

"Nature," said the unknown quietly.

And Merula presumptuously and provokingly continuing to prate, he disputed no further, but assented with evasive politeness. Only in his cold eyes weariness and reserve became more manifest. At last Messer Giorgio, having come to the end of his argument, was reduced to silence. Then the other pointed out certain depressions in the marble, which in no light could be detected by the sight, yet were plain to the touch as the hand moved over the smooth surface. "*Moltissime dolcezze*," he called them; and then his eye travelled over the figure, as if in one look he would possess himself of its sum.

"And I who thought he did not feel!" said Giovanni to himself. "Yet if he feels, how can he measure and split it up into numbers? Who is he, Messer Giorgio?" he whispered; "tell me the name of this man."

"Ha, little monk! is it you?" said Merula turning round; "I had forgot you. Nay, but it is your idol: can it be that you knew him not? It is Messer Leonardo da Vinci."

And the historian presented Giovanni to the Master.

VIII

Through the perfect stillness of early morning in the early spring, when the grass shone emerald between the black olive-roots and the blue iris-flowers were motionless on their slender stems, Giovanni and Leonardo, he on horseback, the lad on foot, returned together to Florence.

"Is this really he?" thought Giovanni, watching him and finding his minutest gesture interesting.

He was over forty. When silent and pensive his small, keen, pale-blue eyes, under overhanging golden eyebrows, seemed cold and piercing; yet when he talked they took an expression of great good nature. The long, fair beard and curling and luxuriant hair gave him an air of majesty. He was tall and powerful in build, yet his face had a subtle charm which was almost feminine, and his thin, high voice, though pleasant, was not manly. His hand, reining a restive steed, was very strong, yet it also was delicate, with long, slender fingers like a woman's.

They were nearing the town walls; and the misty morning sun shone upon the dome of the

cathedral, and the quaint tower of the Palazzo Vecchio.

"This is my opportunity," thought Boltraffio. "I must tell him I would fain enter his studio as a pupil."

Just then Leonardo checked his horse and fixed his eyes on a young falcon circling slowly and easily in the air above its quarry—some duck or heron in the reeds of the Mugnone's bank. Presently, with a short cry, it dropped headlong, like a stone, swooping down from the height and disappearing behind the trees. Leonardo had followed it with his gaze, not losing a single turn, a movement, a flap of the strong wings; then he took his note-book from his girdle and jotted down the result of his observation.

Boltraffio noticed that he held the pencil in his left hand; and remembered strange tales he had heard of his writing in a mysterious reversed hand only to be read in a mirror, from right to left, as men write in the East. Some said he wrote thus to make an enigma of his wicked heretical opinions about nature and about God.

"Now or never!" Giovanni was saying to himself; but all at once Antonio's harsh words flashed across his mind: "'Go to him if you would lose your soul: he is a sinner and an atheist.'"

Smiling, Leonardo drew his attention to an almond-tree, on the crest of a bare, wind-swept hill, very small, very feeble, very solitary, yet already hopeful and joyous, and decking itself

with pale blossoms, which gleamed and glistened against the azure of the sunlit sky.

Boltraffio could not admire it, for his heart was heavy and perplexed. Then Leonardo, as if guessing at this disquietude, spoke gentle words which the young man remembered long afterwards.

"If you wish to be an artist, put away all grief and care from your mind, save that for art itself. Let your soul be as a mirror reflecting all objects, all colours, all movements, but itself remaining ever clear and unmoved."

They passed in through the gates of Florence.

IX

Boltraffio went to the cathedral, where that morning Fra Girolamo Savonarola was to preach. As he entered, the last notes of the organ were dying away under the resounding arches of Santa Maria del Fiore. The throng had filled the church with suffocating heat and with the low rustlings of unceasing small movements. Men, women, and children were separated from each other by drawn curtains. Under the arches, slender and narrow like arrow-heads, deep gloom and mystery reigned as in a sleeping forest. The rays of sunlight, refracted by brilliantly coloured glass, fell in rainbow hues upon the congregation and upon the grey marble of the pillars. The semi-darkness surrounding the altar was broken

by the glare of candles. Mass was over and the crowd was awaiting the preacher. All looks were fixed on the wooden pulpit.

Giovanni found a place in the crowd and listened to the whisperings of his neighbours.

"Will he come soon?" was asked impatiently by a carpenter of low stature, with a pale, perspiring face and lank hair bound by a fillet.

"God knows!" responded a tinker, big and red-faced, but asthmatic. "He has with him at San Marco a certain little brother named Marufi, with a hunchback and a stammering tongue, and 'tis he chooses the hour for his coming. We waited four hours once, and had thought there would be no preaching, yet in the end he came."

"*Santo Dio Benedetto!* And I have waited since midnight! I am blind for sleep and for want of a crumb in my mouth. I could sit down upon knives!"

"Did I not tell thee, Damiano, 't was matter of patience? Even now we are so far from the pulpit we shall hear naught."

"Eh! We shall hear well enough. When he falls to at his shouting and his thundering, not the deaf only but the very dead must needs hear."

"They say now, that he prophesies."

"Not yet! Not till he has built Noah's Ark."

"He has built it; to the last plank. Yea, and made a parabolic description thereof. Its length, Faith; its breadth, Charity; its altitude, Hope. Haste, he says, haste to the Ark of Salvation,

while the doors stand wide. The day cometh when the doors will be put to, and then many shall weep that they have not repented and have not come in time to enter within. To-day he preaches of the Flood, the seventeenth verse of the sixth chapter of the book of Genesis."

"They say he has had another vision: Famine, War, Pestilence!"

"The horse-dealer in Vallombrosa said that a night or two agone great hosts fought in the sky over the city, and one could hear the clash of swords and the dinting of armour."

"And it is a certainty, good folk, that on the *Nunziata* in the Chiesa dei Servi has been seen a bloody sweat."

"Go to! And tears run nightly from the Madonna on the Rubaconte bridge. Lucia, my aunt, saw it herself!"

"And it means no good, rest assured. The Lord have mercy on us, miserable sinners!"

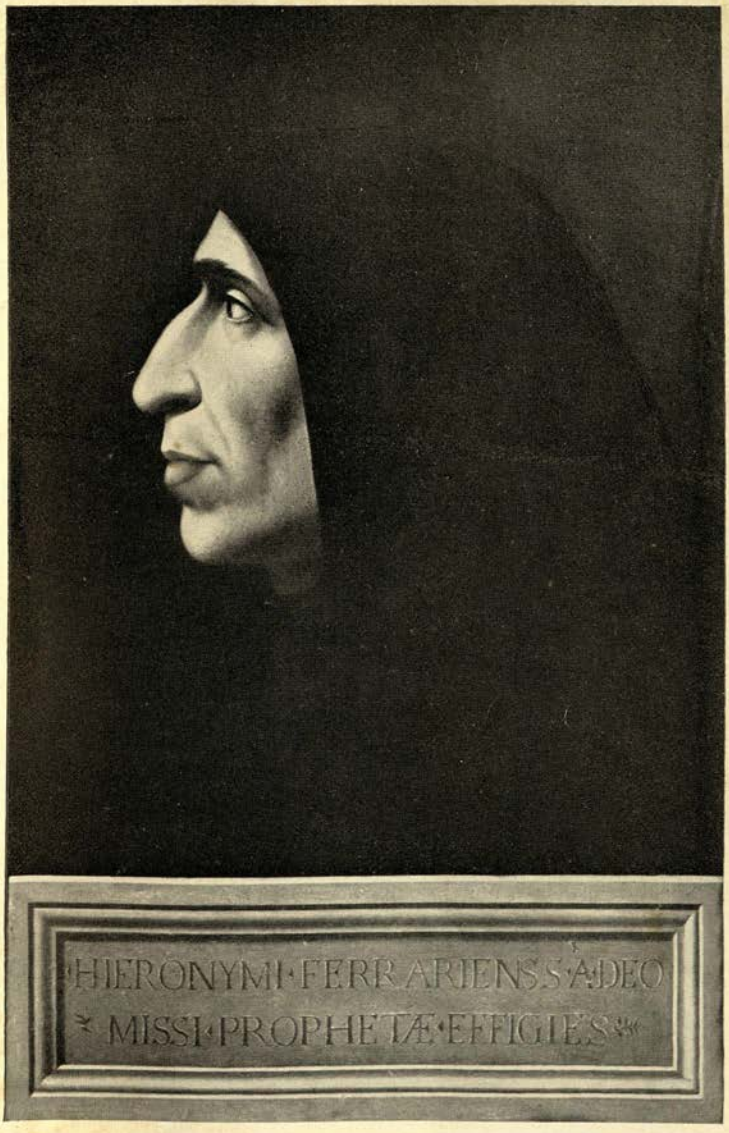
Meanwhile, among the women, there was a disturbance. An old woman fainted, and when lifted up, still did not recover her senses. The whole multitude, indeed, was worn by the interminable waiting; the pale carpenter seemed unable to sustain himself longer.

But suddenly a wave stirred the sea of heads, and a whisper ran through the church.

"He is coming!"

"Nay, 't is not he, 't is Fra Domenico da Pescia."

"I tell you, yea, 't is he! He has come."



Savonarola (Fra Bartolomeo, Florence).

Photo by Anderson.

Giovanni saw a man in the black and white Dominican habit girdled with a rope, who slowly ascended the pulpit-stair and removed his cowl. His face was emaciated and yellow as wax, his lips thick, his nose aquiline, his forehead low. His left hand fell weakly on the desk, his right he raised clutching the crucifix; and silently, with burning eyes, he looked upon the trembling and expectant crowd. Profound silence reigned, in which each man could hear the beating of his own heart. The eyes of the monk glowed increasingly, till they were like fiery coals; but he still kept silence, and the strain of waiting became unendurable. It seemed that in another moment the crowd would burst into screams.

Yet the calm became deeper, more awful; till suddenly rending the silence, came the terrible, lacerating, superhuman cry of the friar:

"*Ecce ego adduco aquas super terram*, Behold I bring a Flood upon the earth!"

A shudder passed through the crowd, raising the hair from the head. Giovanni paled; he fancied the earth quaking, the cathedral arches about to fall. Beside him the stalwart tinker was shaking like a leaf, his teeth chattering. The head of the feeble carpenter had sunk backward on his shoulders as if he had received a blow, his face was shrivelled, his eyelids closed.

What followed was not a sermon but a delirium, which took hold of these thousands of people and shook them as a storm shakes the

withered leaves. Giovanni listened, scarcely understanding. Detached phrases reached his ear:

"See ye, see how the heavens have already darkened; the sun is purple, like clotted blood. Flee! Hide yourselves! There cometh even now a rain of brimstone and fire; a hail of fiery stones and thunderbolts. *Fuge, O Sion, quae habitas apud filiam Babylonis!* O Italy, chastisement cometh upon chastisement. After pestilence, war; and hunger after war! Judgment is here, judgment is there! Everywhere there is judgment. Among you the living suffice not to carry the dead. The dead in your houses shall be so many that the grave-diggers shall call to you to throw them out, and shall heap them on carts, yea, to the very necks of the horses, and shall throw them one upon the other and burn them. And then again they shall go through the streets and cry, 'Who has any dead? Who has any dead?' And you will answer them: 'I throw to you my son, I throw to you my brother, I throw to you my husband!' And then they shall go further, and always they shall cry: 'Bring forth your dead! bring forth your dead!' O Florence! O Rome! O Italy! Past is the time of songs and of feasting; ye are sickened unto death. Lord, Thou art witness, that with my words I would have averted this ruin! But I can no more. I have no words more. I can but weep, and run over with my tears. Mercy! Mercy! O merciful Lord! Alas! my poor people! Alas! my Florence!"

He opened his arms, and the last words had sunk to a scarcely audible whisper. They passed over the crowd and died away, like the rustle of wind in the leaves—a sigh of infinite pity.

Pressing his white lips on the crucifix, he knelt and burst into sobs. The sermon was ended. The slow, heavy organ notes rolled out, persuasive and immense, increasingly solemn and terrible, like the sound of the mighty ocean.

A woman's voice cried "*Misericordia!*"

And thousands of voices answered, calling one to another; and like corn-stalks bowing before the wind, the people fell upon their knees, line upon line, wave upon wave, crowding upon, striking against each other, like a flock of sheep panic-struck at the advance of a storm; and the long, agonising wail of penitents upon whom pressed the terror of immediate ruin rose to Heaven, mingling with the pealing of music, shaking the ground, the marble pillars, and the vaults of the cathedral.

"*Misericordia! Misericordia!*"

Giovanni also sank to his knees, sobbing. The tall tinker rolled against him, breathing hard; the pale carpenter caught his breath and cried like a child, moaning:

"*Misericordia!*"

And Boltraffio remembered his pride, and his love of life, his desire to escape from Fra Benedetto, and to give himself up to the dangerous arts of Messer Leonardo, the enemy of God; he

recalled the past fearful night on the Hill of the Mill, the recovered Venus, his sinful enthusiasm for the heathen beauty of the "White She-Devil"; stretching forth his hands to Heaven, he mingled his voice with that of the despairing crowd, and cried:

"Lord! Lord! have compassion on me! I have sinned before Thee. Pardon, and have mercy."

At that moment, raising his face, wet with tears, he saw at his side the tall, upright form of Leonardo da Vinci. The artist, leaning carelessly against a column, held in his right hand his unfailing sketch-book; with his left he was drawing; now and then he glanced at the pulpit as if hoping to see once more the head of the preacher.

A stranger, and surrounded by the terrified crowd, Leonardo maintained a superb composure. In his cool, blue eyes, on his thin lips tightly compressed like those of a man of minute observation, there was the same aloofness and curiosity with which he had mathematically measured the body of the Aphrodite. At sight of him the tears dried in Giovanni's eyes, and the prayer was silenced upon his lips.

Leaving the church he followed the artist and asked permission to see his sketch. Leonardo demurred, but presently handed the boy his sketch-book. And Giovanni saw a frightful caricature; not Savonarola, but an old and hideous devil in the dress of a monk; like the preacher, indeed, but as if disfigured by self-inflicted and

torturing penance, his pride and his desires still unsubdued. The lower jaw protruded, wrinkles intersected the cheek, the neck was twisted and black as a mummy's, the bushy, beetling brows, the rabid glance scarce preserved a semblance of humanity. All that was dark, terrible, and superstitious, all which gave Savonarola into the power of the deformed, tongue-tied visionary Marufi, was expressed by Leonardo in this sketch; brought out with neither anger nor pity, but with an imperturbable and impartial clear-sightedness.

And Giovanni remembered his words: "*L'ingegno dell' pittore vuol essere a similitudine dello specchio.* The genius of the painter should be as a mirror, reflecting all objects, and colours, and movements, itself ever transparent and serene."

The pupil of Benedetto raised his eyes to the artist's face, and felt that though threatened by eternal damnation, though he were to find in Messer Leonardo a veritable servant of Antichrist, yet to leave him had become impossible; an irresistible force was drawing him to this man; woe unto him if he failed to penetrate into the very depths of this being and of his art.

X

Two days later, Messer Cipriano having been detained by affairs in Florence, and unable to arrange for the transport of the Venus, Grillo

burst in upon him with most unwelcome tidings. Don Faustino, it seemed, had left San Gervaso and betaken himself to San Maurizio, the neighbouring village. Here, having terrified the people with talk of the chastisement of Heaven, he had collected a party by night, besieged the villa, broken in the doors, thrashed Strocco the gardener, who had been left in charge of the statue, and bound him hand and foot. Then the priest had recited over the goddess an ancient prayer called "*Oratio super effigies vasaque in loco antiqua reperta,*" in which the servant of the Church asks God to purify all statuary, vessels, and other objects dug out of the ground, and to convert them to the profit of Christian souls, to the glory of the Trinity, "*ut, omni immunditia depulsa, sint fidelibus tuis utenda per Christum dominum nostrum.*" Then they broke up the statue of the goddess, cast the fragments into a furnace, made of them a cement, and with it daubed the new-raised wall of the village cemetery.

As he told this tale the old man wept for grief. But the event helped Giovanni Boltraffio to a decision. That very day he presented himself before Messer Leonardo and begged to be received as a pupil. Leonardo accepted him.

A little later, tidings were brought to Florence that Charles VIII., Most Christian King of France, had taken the field with a countless host for the conquering of the Two Sicilies, and probably also of Rome and Florence. Panic spread among the

citizens. They perceived that the prophecy of Savonarola was being fulfilled. Punishment was at their door! The sword of the Lord was drawn upon Italy!

BOOK II

ECCE DEUS—ECCE HOMO—1494

"Behold the man!"—St. John xix., 5.
"Behold the God!"
(Inscription on the monument of Francesco Sforza.)

I

"IF the eagle can sustain himself in the rarest atmosphere, if great ships by sails can float across the waves, why cannot likewise Man, by means of powerful wings, make himself lord of the winds, and rise, the conqueror of space?"

Leonardo found these words in one of his old note-books, written five years earlier with the buoyancy of hope. Opposite was the sketch of a machine: a beam to which, by means of iron rods, were attached wings to be moved by cords and pulleys. Now the apparatus seemed to him clumsy and absurd.

His new machine was like an enormous bat. The body of the wings was formed by five wooden fingers, like a skeleton hand, with many joints and pliant articulations. Tendons and muscles connecting these fingers were formed by strips of tanned leather and laces of raw silk. The wing

rose by means of a crank and a movable piston, and was covered by impermeable taffeta. It resembled the webbed foot of a goose. There were four wings moving in turn like the legs of a horse. Their length was forty *braccia*, their spread, eight. They bent backward for propulsion, and dropped to make the machine rise. A man was to sit in it astride, and with his feet in stirrups was to move the wings by a machinery of cords, blocks, and levers. A great rudder, feathered like the tail of a bird, was to be turned by his head.

But a bird, before the first flap of his wings carries him from the earth, must first raise himself by his feet. The short-legged swift, for instance, if placed upon the ground, struggles but cannot fly. Therefore in the machine two cane stilts were indispensable, although their inelegance greatly disturbed the inventor. Perfection could not exist without beauty. He plunged into calculations, hoping to lay his finger on a blunder. Failing, he impatiently drew a pencil across a whole page of figures and wrote on the margin, "Incorrect"; and presently, "*Satanasso!*" He was enraged.

Then he recommenced; but his calculations became more and more confused, and the scarce perceptible error grew increasingly distinct, as he worked on and on by the light of a flickering candle which offended his eyes.

Then his cat, suddenly waking, leaped on the work-table, stretched himself, humped his back,

and began to play with a moth-eaten scarecrow of a stuffed bird dangling from a wooden perch—a contrivance for studying the centre of gravity in the act of flight. The inventor pushed the cat angrily away, nearly knocking him down and causing a plaintive mewing.

"Bless your heart! you may go where you like so long as you don't interfere with me," said Leonardo apologetically, rubbing the smooth, black fur which emitted electric sparks. The cat purred, sat down majestically, doubling his velvet paws under him, and fixing on his master steady green eyes full of self-satisfaction and mystery.

Once more figures, fractions, brackets, equations, cubic and square roots appeared upon the paper. It was the second night he had passed without sleep; for a whole month since his return from Florence he had scarcely set foot outside the house, but had worked unceasingly at the flying-machine.

The branches of a white acacia intruded through an open window, and sometimes cast on the table their tender, odorous blossoms. The moonlight, softened by a mist of clouds, tinted like mother-o'-pearl, flooded the chamber, and mingled with the murky illumination from the tallow candle. The room was choked with machinery and instruments, astronomical, physical, chemical, mechanical, and anatomical. Wheels, levers, springs, screws, chimneys, pistons, arcs, suction-tubes, brass,

steel, iron, and glass, like the limbs of half-seen monsters or colossal insects, peered out of the darkness. There was a diving-bell, beside it the dulled crystal of an optical apparatus resembling a great eye; then the skeleton of a horse, a stuffed crocodile, a human abortion preserved in spirit, a pair of boat-shaped shoes for walking on the water, and lastly, the clay head of a child or of an angel, strayed hither from the sculptor's studio, and smiling slyly and mournfully at its surroundings. In the background were a crucible and blacksmith's bellows, and coals lay red upon the ashes of a furnace. Gigantic wings, one still bare, the other already invested with its membrane, were spread out over all the room, dominating the whole from floor to ceiling. And sprawling on the ground, with nodding head, lay a man, Zoroastro, Leonardo's assistant, who had fallen asleep at his post, oil flowing from the blackened brass ladle which he held in his hand. One of the wings touched the chest of the sleeper, and was softly vibrating as he breathed; it seemed alive, and its sharp upper end rustled against the rafters of the ceiling.

In the uncertain light the machine, with this man between its extended and moving wings, was like some stupendous vampire ready to rise and fly.

II

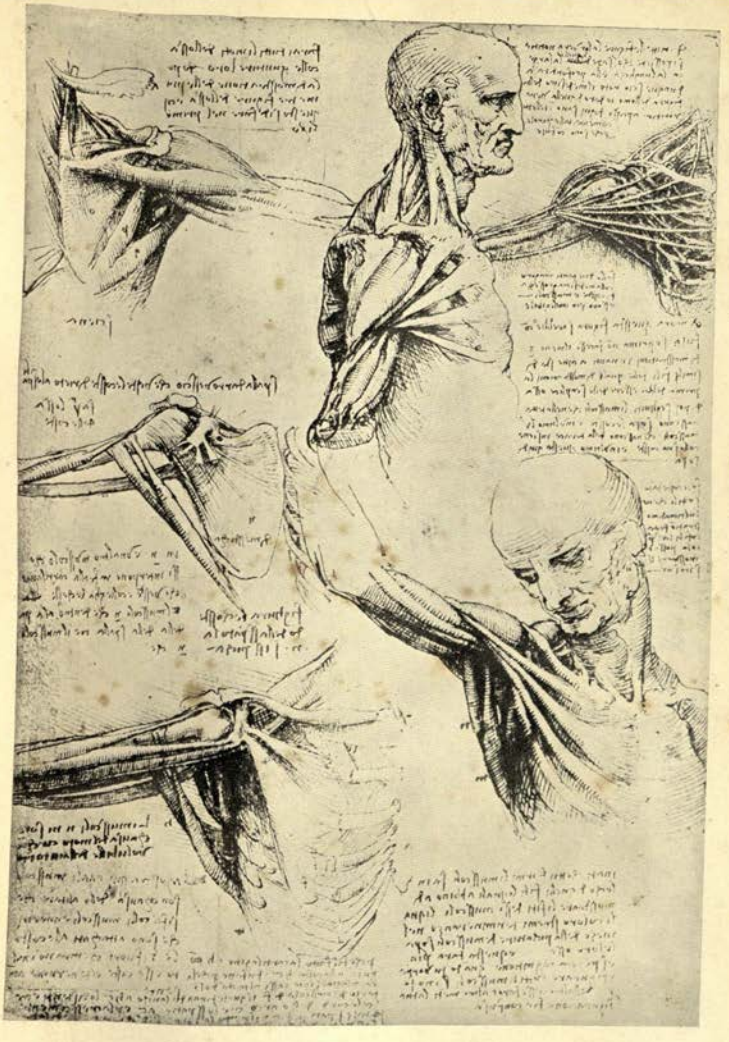
Gardens surrounded Leonardo's house outside

Milan—between the fortress and the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie—and thence came a fine perfume of fruits and herbs, thyme, and bergamot, and fennel. The moon had set. Swallows under the windows were twittering and preparing to fly, ducks splashed and quacked in the neighbouring pond. The candle was dying in its socket; voices of the pupils were heard from the studio hard by.

The students were two, Giovanni Boltraffio and Andrea Salaino. Giovanni was copying an anatomical figure, and sitting before a contrivance for the study of perspective—a wooden frame with a string network which corresponded with lines traced on the drawing-paper: Salaino was fitting a slab of alabaster to a wooden panel. He was a pretty lad with innocent eyes and fair curls, petted by the Master, who drew his angels from him.

"How think you, Andrea?" asked Boltraffio. "Will Messer Leonardo soon finish this machine?"

"God knows!" answered Salaino whistling, and settling the embroidered flaps of his new slippers. "Last year he sat two months at it and nothing resulted but laughter. That crooked bear Zoroastro set himself to fly at all hazards. The Master forbade him, but he did it. The fool hung himself all round with a necklace of bullocks' bladders, lest he should break anything if he fell; then he mounted the roof, flapped his wings; and true it is



Anatomical Studies (Leonardo da Vinci, Windsor).

Photo by Mansell.

he rose, but God wot 't was the wind carried him, and presently he turned topsy-turvy and fell plump on to a dunghill; by the Lord's mercy 't was soft and he broke no bones, but the bladders burst with a roar like a cannon, the daws in the belfry fled away for very terror, and there lay the new Icarus kicking the air, on his head in the manure."

Just then the third pupil entered, Cesare da Sesto, a man no longer young; sickly, and splenetic, with malicious but intelligent eyes. He had a sandwich in one hand, wine in the other.

"Peuh! the sour stuff!" he said, frowning and spitting, "and the ham, by my troth, is boot-leather—yet one pays two thousand ducats annually for these delicacies!"

"Try the other cask from under the pantry stair."

"I have tried it. Of the two 't is the worse"; then pointing to Salaino's new plum-coloured and gaily-feathered cap, he added: "Oho! oho! some of us, it seems, get new things. But 't is the second month since they got any new ham in the kitchen. Of a certainty things are well managed here! We lead dogs' lives. Marco vows on the bones of his mother that the Master has not one *soldo* left in the bag. He has squandered everything on these cursed wings of his and begins his sparing by starving us. But I 'll teach you where else his money goes. In gifts for his darlings, in medals and velvet caps. Have you no shame, Andrea, to receive

alms? Is Messer Leonardo your father or your brother? or are you still a baby?"

"Cesare," interrupted Giovanni, to give a new turn to the discourse, "you made promise to expound me the axioms of perspective. We waste time expecting the Master, who is overstudious of his machine——"

"Ay, ay, my friend. We shall all be confounded some day by that machine, devil take it! And if it is not this machine 't is another. I remember how in the very middle of the *Cenacolo*, the Master, forsooth, must needs break off to invent a new mincing-machine for sausages; and the head of St. James could not get stuck on his shoulders, because Leonardo was dissatisfied with the blades of the cutter. And the best of his Madonnas had to wait in the corner, while he devised a spit for the roasting of sucking-pigs. And what think you of that his other grand discovery, the lye of fowl's-dung for the washing of linen? There is no folly for which Messer Leonardo will not sacrifice his time if he can but get away from his paint-brush"; and Cesare's face puckered itself, and his lips curled in a malicious laugh.

"Why, I pr'ythee, why does God give genius to such men?" he added in a low, trembling voice.

III

Leonardo was still at work, bending over his writing-table. A swallow flew in at the window and wheeled about the room, brushing against the

ceiling and the walls, till caught by the great bat, its little, living wings fast held by the network of artificial tendons. Cautiously Leonardo rose and delicately freed the prisoner, took it in his hand, kissed the silky black head, and let it fly away. The swallow soared, and was lost in the blue air, screaming its cries of joy.

"How simple, how easy its flight," he thought, as he followed it with disappointed, envious eyes. He threw a contemptuous glance at his machine, the dark skeleton of that tremendous bat.

The man who was lying on the floor suddenly awoke. He was a Florentine, a skilful mechanic and smith, by name Zoroastro, or more shortly, Astro da Paretola. A clumsy giant, with the simple face of a child, always covered with soot and grime, he looked a Cyclops, for he had but one eye, the other having been long ago destroyed by a spark from some blazing metal.

Rubbing his single orb and scratching his shaggy head he cried: "The dèvil take me for a blockhead! Master, why did you not hinder me from slumbering? I who was so zealously affected, who only thought how to hurry the evening that the morning and the flying might come!"

"You were wise to sleep," said Leonardo, "for the wings have failed."

"What! these also? Nay, Master, but I will not make your machine again. Think of the money, the labour we have thrown to the wind!

What better can you want? Not to fly, on wings like those, would be impossible! An elephant could rise on them. Pr'ythee, Master, let me try! I will prove them over water, and then if I fall I 'll come off with no worse than a bathing. I can swim as a fish; I was n't born to be drowned."

And he clasped his hands supplicatingly. Leonardo, however, shook his head.

"Patience, friend, have yet patience. It will come in its own time, and then——"

"*Then?*" cried the smith, almost in tears. "Why not *now?* Of a surety, Master, as true as God is in heaven, I shall fly."

"No, Astro, fly thou wilt not. By a mathematical law——"

"I could have sworn you would say that! To the devil with your mathematical laws, for they upset everything. And to think of the years we have laboured! I am sick to remember it! Every gnat, mosquito, fly, I pray you license—every *muck*-fly, every *dunghill*-fly—has its wings; and men crawl like worms. 'Tis rank injustice! And why should we doubt? There they are, your wings, ready, and beautiful; ready to be blessed of God, and spread, and to be off! And then we shall see what we shall see!"

He paused, seemed to recall something, and continued more calmly:

"I would tell you a thing, Master. This very night I dreamed, nay, but I dreamed——"

"I conceive you! You flew."

"Ay. But how? Hear me. I stood in a chamber, where I know not, and amid a throng. They looked at me and pointed, and then they laughed. And I said to myself, 'Cursed spite 't will be if I fly not.' So I got up and I shook my arms and I rose; I warrant you 't was hard, as though I would raise a mountain on my back! But 't was soon lighter, and I rose till my head was in the roof. And they cried aloud, 'Behold him! he flieth!' Ay, and I passed through the window like yon bird, and I circled higher and yet higher, till I touched the sky. And the wind whistled in my ears, and I laughed for very joy. 'Why,' I questioned of myself, 'did I never fly till now? 'Tis mighty easy; and there is no call for any machinery at all.' "

IV

Shouts, oaths, and the quick thump of footsteps interrupted them. The door was flung wide, and a fiery-haired, freckle-faced man, dragging a child of ten by the ear, burst into the chamber. It was Leonardo's pupil, Marco d'Oggionno.

"May the Lord send you an ill Easter!" he shouted. "Rascal, I will set my heels upon your throat!"

"What coil is this, Marco?" asked Leonardo.

"I pray you listen, Master. This same young rogue has filched my silver buckles; ten florins each did they cost me! One he has gambled away at his dice; the other I have found in his

stocking. I did but pull him by the hair, and now, son of the devil that he is, he hath bitten my finger to the bone."

And he would again have attacked the little lad by his curls had not Leonardo rescued him. Then Marco, who kept the keys of the house, took them from his pouch and flung them on the ground.

"Take them up, sir! I will be warden no longer. I live no longer in the house with rascals and with thieves!"

"Peace Marco, peace; and leave this babe to me."

The other three now came from the studio, and presently Maturina, the fat cook, squeezed herself into the group, carrying her market basket. Seeing the little sinner, she flung up her hands and gabbled with the monotony of dry peas pouring through a broken bag. Cesare talked also volubly, demanding why this "pagan of a Jacopo" was allowed to stay, for the playing of every malicious and spiteful trick capable of invention; had he not maimed the watch-dog, stoned the nests of the swallows, torn wings from butterflies?

Jacopo had taken refuge with the Master, his pale pretty face quite impassive, his eyes, sinister in their brilliance, turned to Leonardo with mute supplication.

Leonardo would have appeased the tumult, but on his face sat a strange air of perplexity and weakness, not lost upon the contemptuous Cesare.

Presently the noise subsided of itself; then Leonardo, with his customary calm, called Giovanni and invited him to an inspection of the *Cenacolo*, the Last Supper: his greatest work. Giovanni flushed with pleasure, and they went together.

V

However, they paused by the court-yard fountain that Leonardo, after his sleepless night, might refresh himself by bathing his face. The day was cloudy, but windless, and over all things streamed an argent light which seemed to come from under water; days like these pleased the artist best for painting. They were still at the well when the boy Jacopo crept up, bearing in his hands a little case made of bark.

"Messer Leonardo," he murmured, "I have brought it—for you," and cautiously raising the lid he showed a huge imprisoned spider. "I have watched it this three days," he said enthusiastically; "'t is poisonous! And 't is a terror to see how he devoureth flies!"

His face was radiant now, and catching a fly he gave it to the captive. The spider seized the victim with its hairy legs, and there was a fight and great buzzing.

"He sucks it! He sucks it!" cried the child in an ecstasy; and Leonardo bent over the struggling creatures to watch.

It seemed to Giovanni that on the two so different faces was the same expression: a hideous pleasure in the horrible.

When the fly had been murdered and devoured the boy closed the little box, and said, "I will put it on your table, Messer Leonardo; you will like to see how he fights with other spiders."

Then he raised supplicating eyes, and went on with quivering lips: "Messere, be not wroth with me. I will go from you. I see that I am a trouble to you; you are good, but those others are evil; as truly am I also—I who understand not pretending, as do they! So be it; I will go very far away, and will live alone. 'T will be better so. Only do thou pardon me, Master, I pray, I supplicate. Pardon thou me." And great tears shone on the child's long lashes as he went on. "Pardon me, Master Leonardo, and I will leave you the spider for a remembrance of me. Spiders live many years; and I will ask Astro to feed it."

"Whither would you go, poor child? Nay, Marco shall forgive thee; I am not wroth with thee, and truly I will accept thy spider. In the future, little one, seek to live harmlessly."

Jacopo turned his eyes to his Master, and in them was no gratitude, only unbounded astonishment; and Leonardo smiled at him, as if in his great wisdom he understood the child, and knew him one of those innocent in their wrong-doing, because by nature formed for evil.

"It grows late, Giovanni; let us go on," said Leonardo; and together they trod the silent street which presently led them between the walls of gardens, vineyards, and orchards, to the convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie.

VI

Boltraffio had for some time been distressed by the fact that he could no longer pay his master the monthly fee of six florins which had been arranged. His uncle had quarrelled with him, and now refused him further assistance, and Fra Benedetto, who had lent him the means for two months, could do no more.

So this morning Giovanni determined to explain matters to his Master. He turned deprecatingly to him, and reddening to the roots of his hair, stammered:

"Messere, we are at the 14th of the month, and it was agreed I should pay you on the 10th. It irks me to confess it, but I have no more than these three florins. Would you consent to wait? Soon I have hope to get money. Merula has promised me copying."

Leonardo looked at him astonished.

"What speech is this, Giovanni? Are you not ashamed?"

By his disciple's blush, by his confusion, by his patched shoes and threadbare clothes he guessed that Giovanni was very poor. So he

frowned, and talked of something else; but presently took occasion to hand the boy a gold piece, saying carelessly: "Lad, go buy me twenty sheets of the blue paper for my drawings, and a parcel of red chalk, and another of badger brushes. Take the money."

"A ducat? to pay a matter of ten *soldi?* I will bring you the surplus."

"By no means. I care not for such trifles. Some day, perchance, you will be able to pay it back. And talk no more to me of money: do you hear?"

He went on at once to remark on the misty outlines of the larch trees along both banks of the straight canal called the Naviglio Grande, which carried the eye into the distance by their long rows.

"Have you observed, Giovanni, that in a light mist the trees show blue, in a thick mist, grey?"

And he talked further of the shadows thrown by the clouds upon the hills, one tone in summer when their trees are in leaf, another in winter when their trees are bare. Then he said abruptly:

"You have thought me a skinflint because on our first coming to terms you saw me note every detail of the bargain in a book. I caught that trick from my good father, Pietro, the notary, who knows his way in affairs passing well. But the habit is an idle one for me. I am extreme to mark trifles such as the price of the feather in Salaino's cap; yet thousands of ducats go from

me, and I know not whither. For the future, boy, regard not this trick. If thou hast need of money, take it; and be sure I give it to thee as a father gives to a son."

And Leonardo looked at him with a smile so tender that the pupil's heart was lightened and overflowed with joy. Then again the Master talked of trees, and pointing to a misshapen white mulberry, bade his disciple observe that not only every tree but also every leaf has its own figure different from its fellows, even as every son of man has his own face. It seemed to Giovanni that he spoke of trees with no less insight than he had shown in speaking of his needy disciple; as though loving observation of all things living had sharpened his eye to the penetration of a seer and a clairvoyant.

They were now in sight of Santa Maria delle Grazie, the church belonging to the Dominican convent; a brick edifice with a broad dome like a tent—the early work of Bramante. It rose from the plain behind a grove of dark mulberry trees, and seemed rosy and gay against its background of white and rainy clouds.

The pair passed at once into the convent refectory.

VII

It was a long bare hall, whitewashed, and with a roof of wooden rafters. There was a smell of

damp, of incense, and of fast-day fare. The Father Superior had his dining-board in the recess by the entrance; on either side were the long narrow tables for the monks. So still was it that the buzz of the flies was audible in the windows, glazed with small, yellow, and dusty panes, and hollowed like the cells of a honeycomb. Now and then voices came from the kitchen with a clatter of iron saucepans.

Opposite the prior's table, at the end of the hall, there rose a scaffolding of wood covered with coarse grey linen; Giovanni divined that behind it was the *magnum opus*, upon which the Master had already laboured for twelve years: the *Cenacolo*, the Last Supper.

Leonardo having ascended the scaffold and opened a wooden case which contained his sketches, cartoons, paints, etc., took a small, well-worn, much-annotated Latin book, and handing it to Giovanni, bade him read the thirteenth chapter of St. John. Then he removed the covering from the fresco.

Giovanni's first impression was that he saw not a painting but a prolongation of the room itself against an actual background of air. Another chamber seemed to have opened out behind the withdrawn curtain; the beams of the ceiling passed on into it, contracting in the distance, and the light of day was blended in the quiet evening light above the hills of Zion, which glowed through the triple window. This second supper-room was little

Refectory of the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie at Milan.

Photo by Brogi.

less austere and bare than the convent refectory. Though more solemn, the sacred table, with its cups, plates, knives, and flagons, was like the board at which the monks nightly supped; the cloth with its narrow stripes, its knotted corners, its unsmoothed folds, seemed still damp, as if but just taken from the convent linen room.

Giovanni opened the Gospel and read:

"Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, . . . and supper being ended, the devil having put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him . . .

"Jesus was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake. Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples whom Jesus loved."

Giovanni again raised his eyes to the fresco. The faces of the apostles were so animated that he seemed to hear their speech, to look into the depths of their souls, confounded as they were by the most mysterious, the most terrible of all catastrophes that have ever taken place—the birth of that sin by which God was to die.

Specially was he impressed by Judas, by St. Peter, and St. John. The head of Judas was not yet painted, and the body, bent backward, but dimly outlined. Clutching desperately at the

bag with convulsive fingers, he had overturned the salt-cellar, and the salt was spilled. Peter, impetuous in his wrath, was starting up from behind, a knife still in his right hand, his left on the shoulder of John, as if asking the beloved disciple "Of whom doth He speak?" With his silver hair, with his splendid resentment, his whole frame showed that fiery zeal, that thirst for great deeds, with which, upon understanding the ineluctable sufferings of his Master he was to cry, "Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake!" John, on the contrary, with his long silken tresses, his eyelids lowered as if in the peace of sleep, his folded hands, the long oval of his face, seemed the ideal of calm and heavenly serenity. Alone among the disciples he knew no suffering, no fear, no wrath.

Giovanni saw, and he said to himself: "Here is the true Leonardo! And I had doubted and well-nigh believed the calumnies. The man impious who created that? Nay, who among men is closer to Christ than he?"

The painter, meantime, having completed the face of John with delicate touches of the brush, began the charcoal outline of the head of Jesus. Vainly, however; he had meditated upon that head for ten years, yet still he could not accomplish even the first sketch. Always when confronted by that emptiness where the divine countenance should appear, the artist trembled with mortal

anguish and the sense of his own impotence. Throwing the charcoal aside, passing a cloth over the few lines he had lightly traced, he fell into one of those reveries which sometimes lasted for entire hours. Giovanni ventured to approach him, and saw his face as it were aged, severe, wearing the imprint of unremitting tension, of silent despair.

Yet, his eyes falling on those of his pupil, Leonardo said kindly:

"Well, then, *amico mio*, what say you of it?"

"What words have I, Master? It is beautiful, with a beauty beyond aught in this world. None other has so understood that scene! But nay, I will not speak—I cannot."

His voice shook with tears; but presently he added in a low voice, "One thing I would ask. Among such faces, what can be the face of Judas?"

The Master, without answering, handed him a paper sketch. It showed a face terrible but not repulsive, not wicked even, but big with infinite grief, with the profound bitterness of great knowledge.

Giovanni compared it with that of St. John. "Yes," he exclaimed awestruck; "it is he! He of whom it is said, Satan entered into him; who perhaps knew more than any of them, but who would not accept the cry, that 'all may be one!' because he desired to be *an one* by himself."

He was interrupted by Cesare da Sesto, who

burst into the refectory, followed by a man in the Court livery.

"At last! at last!" he cried. "Master, we have sought you in every place! The Duchess requires you—on a grave matter."

"Your Worship will have the kindness to come with me to the palace," said the servant.

"What is the cause?"

"A disaster, Messer Leonardo. The water pipes do not work; and this morning when Her Excellence was pleased to get into her bath, and her woman had gone to the adjoining chamber for linen, the tap broke, so that Her Excellence was nearly scalded. She is pleased to be very wroth; and Messer Ambrogio Ferrari, the steward, complains greatly, and saith he hath more than once warned Your Worship about these pipes."

"What puerility is this?" replied Leonardo; "can you not see I am at work? Go to Zoroastro. In half an hour he will repair everything."

"Messere, I was told not to return without Your Worship."

Leonardo, however, went back to his picture. But when his eye fell on the blank space destined for the Saviour's head, his brows knit with discouragement, and, realising fresh failure, he descended from the easel.

"Well, we will go. You, Giovanni, come for me to the outer court-yard of the castle, Cesare will show you the way; I will expect you by the *Cavallo.*"

By this name he spoke of his great equestrian statue of Francesco Sforza.

And to Giovanni's amazement, without another glance at the *Cenacolo*, the Master followed the scullion to mend the pipes of the ducal bath.

"So you can't take your eyes off the thing?" said Cesare mockingly to Boltraffio; "certes, 'tis a wonderful work; at least until one sees through it."

"What is your meaning?"

"Ask me not. I won't spoil your faith. Mayhap in the end you will discover for yourself. Meanwhile, admire."

"Cesare, tell me your thought."

"Good, then. Only be not wroth at the truth. I know all you will find to say and I will not dispute with you. In good sooth, it is wonderful. No master hath so much anatomy, such perspective, such science of chiaroscuro. I challenge it not. All is direct from nature, the face wrinkles, the folds in the cloth, everything. But the living spirit, where is that? the God is absent; and will absent Himself for ever. At bottom, in the soul, all is ice and death! Look, Giovanni! use your eyes! See the geometrical regularity; four triangles, two contemplative, two active; and their centre is Christ. Look narrowly. On the right you have perfect goodness in John, perfect badness in Judas, the dividing of good and evil (that is, justice) in Peter. Beside them the active triad, Andrew, James, and Bartholomew. Now

turn to the left; another contemplative triangle; the love of Philip, the faith of James, the wisdom of Thomas; then again, activity in another triad. Not inspiration, Giovanni, but geometry; mathematics in the seat of beauty. All calculated, reasoned *ad nauseam*, tested to repulsion, weighed in the balance, measured by the compasses. Under the holy things—contempt."

"Cesare, Cesare!" cried Giovanni with gentle reproof. "How little you know the Master! Why do you hate him?"

"And you think perchance you know him, and therefore you love him?" returned Cesare quickly, turning to his companion with a bitter smile. In his eyes blazed such unextinguishable malice that Giovanni instinctively averted his own.

"You are unjust, Cesare," he resumed after a pause; "the picture is incomplete; the Christ is not yet there."

"And will He be there? Do you expect it? Well, we shall see. Only mark you my words. I say Messer Leonardo will never finish the *Cenacolo;* never paint the Judas, nor the Christ! For, see you, my friend, one may do much by mathematics and by experiments in science; but not everything. More is needed. There is a limit which he, with all his learning, can never pass."

They left the monastery and moved towards the Castello di Porta Giovia. Boltraffio was long silent, then he said:

"In one point, Cesare, you certainly are in error. The Judas exists already; I have seen it "

"When? Where?"

"Just now—in the convent. He showed me the drawing."

"You?"

Cesare stared, then said slowly, and as if by an effort:

"How was it? Good?"

Giovanni nodded; and Cesare after this kept silence.

VIII

Arrived at the castle gates, they crossed the drawbridge to the Torre del Filarete, which looked to the south, and was deeply moated. Here even at noon it was dark; and the air was laden with an undefinable odour of barracks—the smell of stables, straw, and sour bread. Under the resounding arches came echoes of the laughter and curses of the hired foreign soldiery.

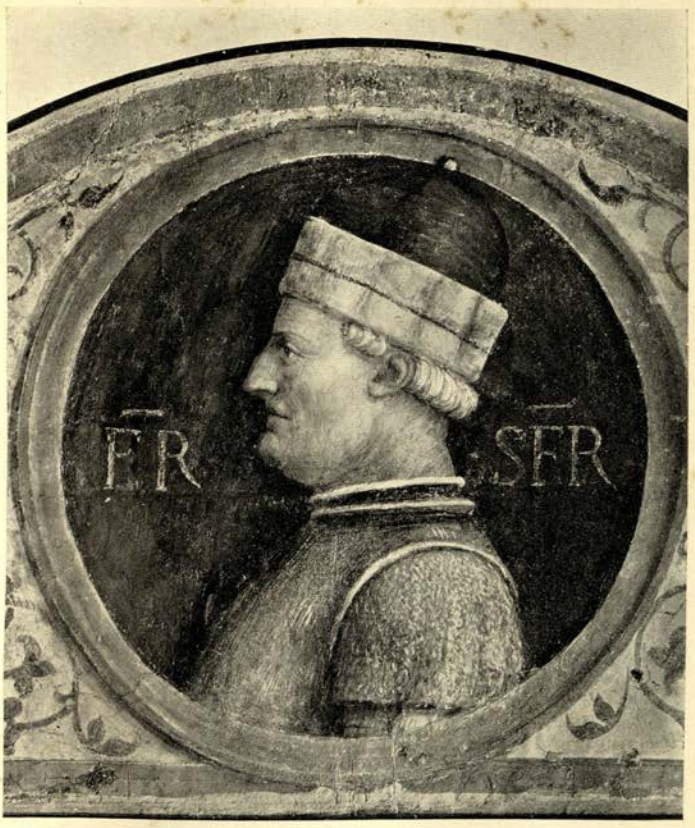
Cesare had the pass; but Giovanni was regarded with mistrust, and his name entered in the guard-book. Crossing a second drawbridge, where they submitted to a second examination, they reached the deserted inner court of the castle called the Piazza d'Arme. Straight before them was the stern Torre di Bona; to the right, the entrance to the Corte Ducale; to the left, the Rocchetta, a veritable eagle's nest, the part of

the castle most difficult of access. In the centre of the square, surrounded by ill-made wooden fences, which were already moss-grown and weather-stained, rose an unfinished colossal equestrian statue in greenish clay: *Il Cavallo*, the bold achievement of Leonardo da Vinci, no less than twenty *braccia* in altitude. The tremendous horse, dark against the watery sky, was rearing; a fallen warrior was beneath his hoofs; on his back, Francesco Sforza, the great *condottiere*, half soldier, half brigand, wholly adventurer, who had served with his sword and his blood for money. The son of a peasant, strong as a lion, astute as a fox, he attained by sagacity, by crime, and by great exploits the summit of power, and died on the throne of the Dukes of Milan. Pale sunshine fell full on the colossal figure, and in the grossness of the double chin, in the rapacity of the fierce and vigilant eye, Giovanni saw the calm of the gorged wild beast. Leonardo himself had inscribed the clay with this distich:

"Expectant animi molemque futuram
Suscipiunt; fluat aes; vox erit; Ecce Deus."

The last two words were astounding to Giovanni. "Behold the god."

"A god?" he repeated, looking at the colossal clay, at the victim trampled by the violent conqueror. He remembered the quiet convent refectory of "Our Lady of Grace," the hills of Zion, the celestial beauty of St. John, the still-



Francesco Sforza (Luini, Milan).

Photo by Anderson.

ness of the Last Supper: and that God, of whom it was said, "Behold the Man!"

At this moment Leonardo himself appeared.

"Let us hurry," he said; "it seems that the kitchen chimneys are smoking; and if we do not flee they will be calling me back to mend them."

Giovanni could not answer him; he stood downcast and pallid.

"Master," he said presently, "I crave your pardon; but I have thought long, and still I comprehend not how you were able to create the *Cavallo* and the *Cenacolo* at one and the same time."

Leonardo looked at his disciple in quiet surprise.

"Why not?"

"Oh, Messer Leonardo! do you not feel yourself that they are impossible together?"

"No, Giovanni. To my thinking, one helps out the other. My best ideas for the *Cenacolo* come to me when I am working at the Colossus; and in that convent refectory yonder, I love to think upon this monument of Duke Francesco. The works are twins. I began them together, and together I shall finish them."

"Together! Christ, and this man? It is impossible!" And ignorant how to express his thought, yet feeling his heart on fire, he repeated passionately, "It is impossible!"

"And why?" asked the Master with his quiet smile.

Giovanni would have tried to reply; but meeting

those calm uncomprehending eyes, the words died upon his lips, for Leonardo would not have understood them. So he held his peace and thought within himself.

"Strange! An hour ago, looking at his picture, I fancied that I knew him. And now I find I do not know him at all. Of which of those twain does he say in his heart: 'Behold the god'?"

IX

That night when all others slept, Giovanni, tormented by insomnia, rose and went into the court, where was a stone bench under a tent of vine branches. The court was square, and in its centre was a well; behind the bench was the wall of the house, opposite the stable; to the left a stone wall with a wicket-gate which opened on the street of the Porta Vercellina; to the right the wall of a little garden and a door always locked and leading to a separate building. Here Astro alone was allowed ingress, and here Leonardo was wont to work in complete seclusion.

The night was still and warm, with a thick mist, penetrated by dim moonlight. A low knock sounded on the gate which opened on the road; the shutter of one of the lower windows was opened, and a man peered out, asking:

"Monna Cassandra?"

"'T is I. Open!"

Astro came from the house and let her in: a girl

clad in white, which the moonlight and the mist changed to a strange green. They parleyed together at the gate; then passed Giovanni without seeing him, where he sat in the deep shadow of the vine branches.

The girl seated herself on the low wall of the well. Her face was an odd one, immobile and placid, like the faces of old statues. She had a low forehead, straight black eyebrows, too small a chin, and eyes of transparent amber. But what chiefly struck Giovanni was her hair, so light, so soft, so crisp, as if possessed of life. Like the Medusa's aureole of serpents, its blackness framed her face, making its paleness paler, its lips more scarlet, its amber eyes more translucent.

"Then you too, Astro, have heard speak of Frate Angelo?" said the girl.

"Yes, Monna Cassandra. They say the Pope hath sent him to extirpate heresy and black magic. And I tell you, merely to hear what is told of the Fathers Inquisitors raises the hair of your skin! God keep us from their claws! Monna Cassandra, be discreet; and, above all, warn your aunt."

"A pretty aunt she is to me!"

"It matters not. Warn that Monna Sidonia with whom you live."

"Then, blacksmith, you suppose us witches?"

"I suppose nothing. Messer Leonardo hath taught me there is no witchcraft; nor can be any, by the law of nature. Messer Leonardo knows everything and believes in nothing."

"Believes in nothing? Not in the Devil? Not in God?"

"Jest not! Messer Leonardo is a saint."

"And your flying-machine?" she said contemptuously; "is it ready?"

The smith waved his hand despairingly.

"Ready? We are going to make it all over again!"

"Astro! Astro! You credit this nonsense? These machines are dust cast into the eyes. I wager Messer Leonardo has flown many a time ere now."

"Flown? How?"

"He flies—as I fly."

He surveyed her thoughtfully.

"You fly in dreams, Monna Cassandra."

"You think that is it? Nay, others have seen me fly. Perhaps you know not the tale?"

The smith scratched his head hesitatingly.

"But I forget," she said mockingly; "you are all learned folk here, who believe not in miracles, but in mechanics."

"S'death! Those same mechanics are a weight on my neck. Did you but know—" He spread out his hands appealingly, and continued: "Monna Cassandra; you know my faithfulness. Nor is there temptation to chatter, lest Frate Angelo play eavesdropper. Tell me, then, in all secrecy, tell me of your charity with all the particulars——"

"Tell you what?"

"How you fly."

"Not that, my friend; no. If you know too much you will age too soon."

She paused; then said softly, after a long look straight into his eyes: "What avails it to talk? You must act."

"What is required?" asked Astro in trembling tones, and turning pale.

"You must know a certain word, and you must anoint your skin with a certain unguent."

"Have you this unguent?"

"Yes."

"And you know the word?"

She nodded.

"And then one can fly?"

"Try. You will find my method simpler than your mechanics."

The single eye of the smith blazed with the madness of desire.

"Monna Cassandra, give me your unguent."

She suppressed a laugh.

"You are a simpleton, Astro. Five minutes ago you called magic foolery; now, it seems, you believe in it."

Astro hung his head, convicted, but unrepentant.

"I wish to fly. I care little if I attain by mechanics or by miracles. What I can endure no longer is waiting."

The girl laid her hand on his shoulder.

"I see, I see. Truly, I pity you. It is clear your brain will crack if you don't get to your

flying. Good, then; I will give you the drug and I will teach you the word. But you likewise, Astro, you must do what I ask of you."

"I will, Monna Cassandra. I will do anything. Speak."

The girl pointed to the wet roof beyond the garden wall.

"Let me enter there."

But Astro frowned and shook his head.

"Nay. I will do whatever you ask, saving only that."

"And why not that?"

"I have promised my Master to let none in."

"But you go thither?"

"Yea."

"What is there within?"

"No mystery, Monna Cassandra; nothing of moment. Machines, appliances, books, manuscripts. Certain strange plants, beasts, creeping things. Travellers bring them from distant lands. And there is one tree which has been poisoned."

"What? poisoned?"

"Ay. He has it for experiments: that he may know the effect poison has upon plants."

"Good Astro, tell me all you know of that tree."

"There is naught to tell. Early in the spring season he bored him a hole in its trunk, to the very core; and with a long thin needle he squirted in some venom."

"What strange experiments! And of what sort is the tree?"

"A peach-tree."

"What followed? Was the fruit also poisoned?"

"It will be so when ripe."

"Can you see in the peaches that they are poisoned?"

"No; and that is why he permits no entry, lest some one might eat the fruit and die."

"Have you the key?"

"Ay."

"Good Astro, give it to me!"

"Monna Cassandra! Have I not sworn to him?"

"Give me the key; and I will compass it that to-night you shall fly—this very night. See, this is the drug."

She drew from her bosom a phial which contained a dark liquid; and putting her face close to his, she whispered wheedlingly: "What is it you fear, simpleton? You say there are no mysteries. Well, then, let us go and make sure. The key, Astro, the key!"

"No," he replied, "I will not let you enter; and I care nothing for your secret. Leave me."

"Coward!" cried the girl, fine scorn on her face; "it is possible for you to know the secret, and you dare not hear it! Now I see plainly he is a sorcerer, and he tricks you as he would trick an infant!"

But neither could scorn move him; he turned away his head, listening sullenly. Then Cassandra drew nearer again.

"Well, Astro, so be it. I will not enter. Only do you set the door ajar and let me peep——"

"You will not go in?"

"No; only open and let me just look."

At this he drew forth the key and unlocked the door.

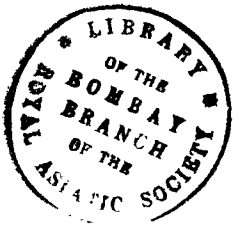
Giovanni, rising softly and drawing nearer, saw a common peach-tree at the far end of the little walled garden; under the dim green moonlight the tree seemed weird and ill-omened.

Standing in the doorway, the girl looked about her with the wide eyes of eager curiosity. Then she took a step forward. The smith held her back; but she freed herself and slipped through his hands like a snake. He again pushed her out, almost overthrowing her. But she recovered her balance easily, and looked him full in the eyes. Her face pale, livid, and contracted with rage, was terrifying; at that moment she truly seemed a witch.

The smith clapped to the door, and without further speech retreated to the house, she following him with her golden eyes. Presently she strode hastily past Giovanni, and through the wicket into the road of the Porta Vercellina. Once more silence reigned, and the mist thickened; all things vanished in it.

Giovanni, left alone, closed his eyes painfully. Before him rose as in a vision the awful tree, the heavy drops on its damp leaves, its poisoned fruits, pallidly illuminated. And he thought of the words:

"Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat. For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."



BOOK III

THE POISONED FRUITS—1494

"And the Serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die. For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."—GEN. iii., 4 and 5.

"Faciendo un bucho con un succhiello dentro un albusciello, a chacciandovi arsenicho e risalgallo e sollimato stemperati con acqua arzente, a forza di fare e sua frutti velenosi."—LEONARDO DA VINCI.

(Having pierced the heart of a young tree, inject arsenic, a reagent and corrosive sublimate, diluted with alcohol, so as to envenom even the fruit.)

I

BEATRICE, the Duchess, used every Friday to bathe her hair, and then tincture it with gold, after which she dried it in the sunshine. For her convenience she had caused balustraded *altane*, or platforms, to be erected on the roof of the splendid ducal villa of the Sforzesca, which stood on the right bank of the Ticino, near the fortress of Vigevano, among the fat pastures and the ever green water-side meadows of the province of Lomellina. Here, then, she sat, patiently supporting the blazing heat at an hour

Beatrice d'Este (Leonardo da Vinci, Milan).

Photo by Anderson.

when even husbandmen and their oxen were wont to creep into the shadow. She wore a *schiavinetta*—a loose white silk wrapper without sleeves. On her head was a kind of straw sun-shade, or hat, from the opening in the top of which flowed out the broad masses of her gilded and rippling hair. An olive-skinned Circassian slave was moistening the hair with a sponge, fixed on the point of a spindle; and a Tartar, slit-eyed and crooked, was combing it with an ivory comb.

The dye was made in May of the roots of walnut trees, saffron, ox-gall, swallows' lime, ambergris, bears' claws, and the fat of lizards. Close beside the Duchess, and watched by herself, an infusion of musk roses and precious spices was simmering in a long-necked retort, upon a tripod over an invisible flame.

Both the waiting-maids were bathed in perspiration; even the Duchess's lap-dog was ill at ease on this burning *altana*, and, panting and lolling out his tongue, gazed reproachfully at his mistress, nor responded as usual to the provocation of the monkey. The latter was luxuriating in the heat, however, like the negro page, who held the gemmed and jewelled mother-o'-pearl mirror.

Though the Lady Beatrice constantly endeavoured to compose countenance and deportment to the severity becoming her rank, it was hard to believe that she was nineteen, had been married three years, and had borne two children.

In the girlish roundness of her dark cheek, in the childish dimple, the slender throat, the chin too plump; in the full lips tightly compressed as if always tempted to pout; in the slight shoulders and flat bosom; in the abrupt boyish movements, she appeared still a schoolgirl, spoiled, wilful, restless, and even selfish. Yet prudence and intelligence shone from the steady, dark eyes; and the Venetian Ambassador, Marino Sanuto, most astute of statesmen, had written in his private letters to his Government that this girl was hard as flint, and gave him far more trouble than did her husband, Il Moro; who, indeed, showed his wisdom by obeying her about everything.

The dog barked angrily, and up the winding stair which led to the *altana* came laboriously an old woman habited like a widow. In one hand she held a crutch, in the other a rosary; the wrinkles in her face might have given her a reverend aspect, had not the withered mouth smiled hypocritically, and the eyes sparkled with audacious cunning.

"Ugh, ugh! How detestable is old age! I could hardly drag myself hither. May the Lord preserve youth and health to Your Excellency," said the old woman, kissing the hem of the *schiavinetta.*

"Well, Monna Sidonia, is it ready?"

The crone drew from her pouch a carefully-wrapped, closely-stoppered phial, containing a turbid, whitish liquid,—the milk of a red goat

and of an ass, distilled with wild anise, asparagus, and white lilies.

"In good sooth, Your Excellency should keep it two little days more in good horse litter. Yet it can be used at once if needful; only first strain it through a filter. Wet with it crumbs of stale bread, and then be pleased to rub your noble countenance for such a period as would take the reciting of three *credos*. In five weeks' time all swarthiness will be removed, and pimples beside."

"Hearken, old woman," said Beatrice; "in this lotion there are again, mayhap, some of the abominable things used in black magic,—snakes' fat, perchance, or plovers' blood; or powdered lizards, fried in a frying-pan: such as there were in that unguent you gave me for withering the hair in my cheek-moles. If it be so, tell me at once."

"Your Excellency should not lend your ear to the calumnies of the malignant. I work honestly, as my conscience dictates; but no one can do without dirt sometimes. The magnificent Madonna Angelica, for example, all last year washed her head with dogs' urine, so as to preserve her hair, which was falling out; and thanked God and me it cured her." Then, bending down to the Duchess's ear, she told the latest gossip: how the young wife of the Master of the Guild of the Salters, the lovely Madonna Filiberta, was deceiving her husband with a Spanish cavalier, and diverting herself hugely.

"And doubtless," said Beatrice, jestingly threatening with her finger, "'t was you who brought the poor thing to it, you old bawd!"

"Does Your Excellency call her *poor?* Nay, she sings me her thanks every hour. Now she knows the difference between the kiss of a spouse and the kiss of a lover."

"But the sin? Doth not her conscience bite her?"

"Her conscience? Madam, I hold the sin of love the work of nature. And a few drops of holy water can wash the sin away. Madonna Filiberta is but giving her spouse a Roland for his Oliver."

"Is your meaning that likewise the husband——"

"Say it for certain, I do not—but sure it is that all married men harp on one string. There is none of them but would sooner have a single hand than a single wife."

The Duchess laughed. "Ah, Monna Sidonia, Monna Sidonia, there's no tripping you! But where do you learn all these things?"

"Believe the word of an old woman; what I tell you is gospel truth. And in matters of conscience I know the difference between a beam and a mote. All fruit gets ripe in its season. If she have not her fill of love when she be young, a woman will fall into such longing when she is old, that she will go straight into the claws of the Devil."

"You preach like a doctor of theology."

"Nay, I am unlearned; but I speak from my heart, and I tell Your Excellency that youth comes but once in life; for what the devil—Lord forgive me!—is the use of us women when we are old? Perhaps to throw charcoal on the brazier, and to count the pots and the pans in the kitchen. Not for nothing says the proverb:

'La giovane mangia, la vecchia s'ingozza.'[1]

Beauty without love is like matins without a paternoster."

"What! Say that over again!" laughed the Duchess.

The old woman, thinking she had now trifled enough, again bent to the lady's ear and whispered. Beatrice ceased to laugh, her face darkened. She dismissed her attendants, excepting the little blackamoor who had no Italian. Around them was only the still and glowing air, which seemed to have paled under the fury of the heat.

"Folly!" answered the Duchess; "such chattering is of no moment."

"Signora, I saw with my eyes, I heard with my ears. Others will tell you the like."

"Were there many persons?"

"Ten thousand. The piazza before the Castle of Pavia was thronged."

"What heard you?"

"When Madonna Isabella came forth bearing the little Francesco there was a beating of hands,

[1] *Ingozzare*, to swallow; also, to bear an affront meekly.

a waving of caps, and a many who shed tears. '*Viva* Isabella of Aragon!' they cried, '*Viva* Gian Galeazzo and his heir, our true and legitimate lord! Death to the usurpers of his throne!'"

Beatrice frowned. "Those were the very words?"

"Ay; but there was worse."

"Speak—fear nothing."

"They cried—my tongue, *Signora mia*, refuses —but they cried 'Death to the Robbers!'"

Beatrice shivered; mastering herself, however, she asked calmly, "Was there more?"

"Of a truth, I know not how to tell it to Your Excellency."

"Haste thee, I would know all."

"Believe me, madam, they said that the most noble Duke, Ludovico il Moro, the guardian and the benefactor of Gian Galeazzo, holds his nephew in the fortress of Pavia, and surrounds him with assassins and spies. Then they demanded that the Duke himself should come out to them, but Madonna Isabella answered that he lay sick."

And again Monna Sidonia whispered in the Duchess's ear.

"But you are distraught, you old hag," cried the lady. "Beware, lest I have you thrown from this roof, so that not even a crow can get your bones together."

The threat did not frighten Monna Sidonia. Beatrice also soon calmed.

"I don't believe a word of it," she said, observing the crone furtively.

"As you please, Excellency," answered the other, shrugging lean shoulders, "but nothing can prevent my words from being true. See you," she continued insinuatingly, "you make a small figure of wax, and you put a swallow's heart in at the right side, at the left its liver, then you pierce it with a needle, uttering charms the while; and he will die of a slow death, nor is there doctor who can save him."

"Silence!" commanded the Duchess.

The hag again devoutly kissed the hem of the *schiavinetta.* "Your Grace is my sun. I love you overmuch, 't is my worst fault." She paused, then added, "It can be done also without witchcraft."

The Duchess was silent, but she looked at the woman curiously.

"As I came by the palace garden," resumed Monna Sidonia, dryly, "I saw the gardener collecting fair ripe peaches in a basket, a present doubtless for Messer Gian Galeazzo." Another pause, and she continued, "And likewise in the garden of Messer Leonardo da Vinci, the Florentine, there are fair ripe peaches, but empoisoned."

"Empoisoned?"

"Ay, Monna Cassandra, my niece, saw—" And again she whispered.

The Duchess made no answer. By this time her hair was dry, and she rose, threw off the

schiavinetta, and descended to the apartment known as the wardrobe. Here were three huge presses; the first, large as that in some great sacristy, contained the eighty-four dresses which she had found time to acquire in the three years of her married life; some so stiff with gold and jewels that they could stand on the floor by themselves, others diaphanous, imponderous as the web of a spider. In the second press were riding-dresses, and all furniture for hawking. In the third, essences, waters, washes, unguents, powders for the teeth of white coral and seed-pearls, innumerable vases, retorts, rectified alembics, crucibles—in short, a complete laboratory of female alchemy; precious cedar-wood chests, also, covered with paintings and embroidery. From one of these the waiting-woman drew forth a chemise of the purest whiteness. The room filled with a scent of lavender, oriental iris, and dried Damascus roses.

While she dressed, Beatrice conversed about the trimming of a new gown just received by courier from her sister, Isabella d'Este, the Marchioness of Mantua. The sisters vied with each other in elegance, and Beatrice paid a Court spy to keep her informed of all the novelties in the Mantuan wardrobe.

The Duchess attired herself in her favourite robe, which, striped with gold satin and green velvet, made her seem taller than she was. The open-work sleeves were tied with bands of grey

silk, slashed in the French mode, and showing the white puffings of the undergarment. Her hair was plaited and confined in a gold net and fine gold cord, which was clasped by a scorpion of rubies.

II

She was in the habit of spending so long a time at the morning toilette that the Duke said he could as quickly have fitted a merchant ship for the Indies. On this occasion, however, hearing a distant sound of horns and the baying of hounds, she remembered that she had ordered a hunt, and consequently hurried. When dressed, she paid a passing visit to the chamber of her dwarfs, which, in imitation of the royal play-room of Isabella d'Este, she nicknamed "the Apartment of the Giants." Here everything was arranged for a population of pygmies: chairs, beds, furniture, ladders, even a chapel with a toy altar at which daily service was read by a learned dwarf named Janachi in archiepiscopal robes and mitre. Among the "giants" was always much noise: laughter and weeping, the cries of various and eerie voices from hunchbacks, apes, parrots, idiots, Tartars, buffoons, and other absurd creatures, with whom the youthful Duchess sometimes passed whole days playing. To-day she looked in merely to inquire after the health of a little negro named Nannino, lately sent from Venice. His skin had been so black, that in the words

of his former mistress, "Nothing more exquisite could be desired," but now that he had fallen ill it had become apparent that his hue was not entirely natural, for a coating, black and shining like lacquer, was peeling off and causing great chagrin to Beatrice. However, she loved him in spite of his growing fairness, and hearing with distress that he was likely to die, she gave orders to have him christened as quickly as possible.

Descending the staircase, she met Morgantina, her favourite female fool, who was young, pretty. and so whimsical that she "could rouse even the dead to laughter." She stole and hid booty like a magpie, but if spoken to kindly would confess her crimes, and was simple and innocent as a child. Sometimes, however, she fell into fits of melancholy, wailing for her lost son (who had never existed). This morning she was sitting on the stair hugging her knees and sobbing distractedly. Beatrice patted her on the head.

"Cease, little one, cease," she said; "be good."

The fool, raising her childish blue eyes streaming with tears, made reply, "Oh! oh! oh! they have taken my baby away! And, O Lord, why? What harm had he done?"

Without another word the Duchess went down into the court-yard where the huntsmen were awaiting her.

III

Surrounded by outriders, falconers, beaters,

equerries, pages, and court-ladies, Beatrice sat her slender dark bay Arab—a superb creature from Gonzaga's stables—like an expert horseman. "A true queen of Amazons," thought her husband proudly, as he came out of the pleached alley before the palace to watch his consort's start.

Behind the Duchess rode a falconer in a sumptuous livery embroidered with gold. A snow-white Cyprus falcon, a gift from the Sultan, its golden hood glittering with emeralds, and little bells attached to its claws, sat on his left hand.

Beatrice was in lively humour; she looked at her husband with a smile, but when he said, "Be wary! the horse is mettlesome," she signed to her companions and darted off at a gallop, first along the road, then over the open fields, across ditches, hillocks, and trenches. Her retinue fell behind; but Beatrice was attended by a huge wolf-hound, and by her side, on a black Castilian mare, the gayest and boldest of her maidens, rode Madonna Lucrezia Crivelli. The Duke was by no means indifferent to this lady, and as he watched her and Beatrice side by side in this mad gallop, it would have perplexed him to say which of the two he admired the more. However, he certainly experienced an invincible anxiety for his young wife, and when she leaped a deep chasm, he closed his eyes and caught his breath. Often he had reproved her for these follies, but had not the heart to forbid them;

deficient himself in physical courage, he was proud of the daring of his lady.

The party descended into the ravine and disappeared among the osier thickets of the low banks of the Ticino, the breeding place of ducks, woodcock, and herons.

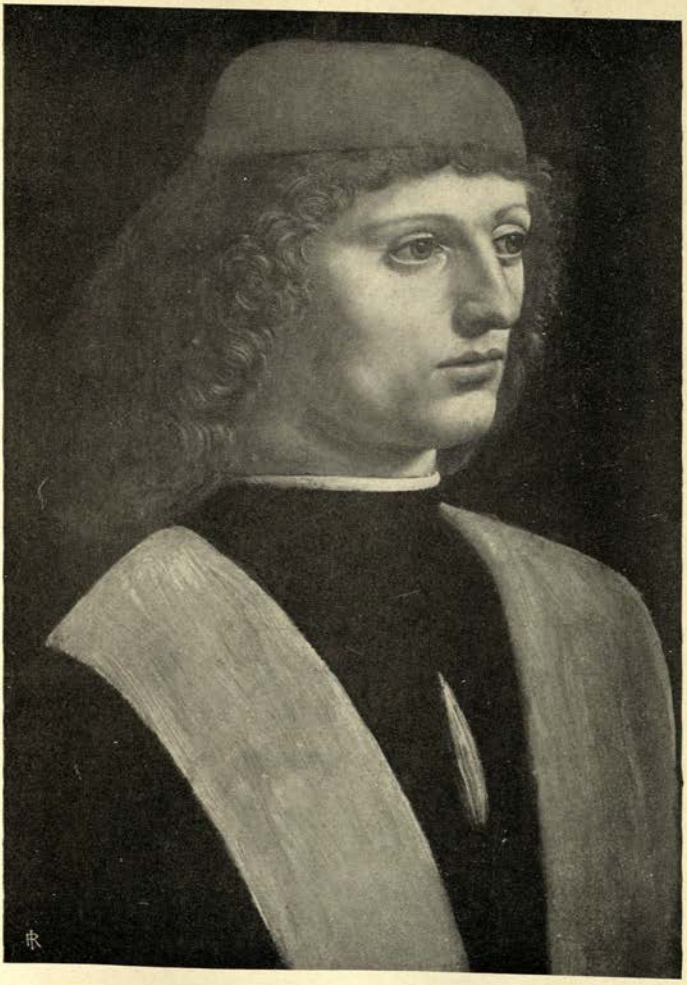
Then the Duke returned to his *studiolo*, where Messer Bartolomeo Calco, his chief secretary, who had charge of the embassies from the foreign Courts, was awaiting commands.

IV

Sitting in his high-backed arm-chair, Ludovico Sforza softly stroked his smooth-shaved chin with a white and well-kept hand. His handsome face wore that expression of perfect candour which is acquired by past masters in political trickery; his high-bridged aquiline nose, and subtly writhen lips recalled his father Francesco, the great *condottiere;* though if Francesco were, as the poets said, at once lion and fox, Ludovico was merely fox. He was attired in pale blue silk, puffed and embroidered; his smooth hair covered ears and brow like a wig, and a gold chain dangled on his breast; in word and gesture he was uniformly courteous and urbane.

"Have you certain intelligence, Messer Bartolomeo, of the departure of the French army from Lyons?"

"None, Your Excellency. Every evening they



Ludovico Sforza (Leonardo da Vinci, Milan).

Photo by Anderson.

say 'to-morrow, every morning they say 'to-night.' The King wastes himself in unwarlike amusements."

"Who is his first favourite?"

"Many names are mentioned, the taste of His Majesty is variable."

"Write to Count Belgioioso that I send him thirty—no—forty or fifty thousand ducats to spend in new donatives; let him spare nothing. We must draw this King out of Lyons by golden chains. And, Bartolomeo—but repeat this not—it were well to send His Majesty the portraits of some of our fairest ladies. By the way, is the letter ready?"

"It is, Signore."

"Show it to me."

Il Moro rubbed his white hands for pleasure. Every time he contemplated his huge web of policy, he felt an agreeable stirring at heart; he loved the dangerous game. Nor did he blame himself for having summoned the foreigners, the northern barbarians, into Italy; his enemies had forced him to this extreme measure, chiefly the consort of Gian Galeazzo, Isabella of Aragon, who openly accused him of having usurped the throne of his nephew. Yet it had not been till her father, Alfonso of Naples, had intervened, threatening war and dethronement, that Ludovico had appealed to Charles VIII., King of France.

"Inscrutable are thy ways, O Lord!" thought the Duke piously, while his secretary searched

for the letter in a pile of papers; "the salvation of my kingdom, of Italy, perhaps of all Europe, is in the hands of this abortion of nature, this libertine, this witless boy, whom they name the Most Christian King of France; before whom we, the heirs of the glory of the Sforzas, must crouch, and creep, and play the pander. But such are politics; he who hunts with wolves must howl with them."

He read over the letter, which seemed to him sufficiently well expressed.

"May the Lord bless thy crusading army, O Most Christian," so it ran; "the gates of Ausonia stand open to thee. Hesitate not to enter in triumph, a new Hannibal! The peoples of Italy yearn to bow beneath thy gentle yoke, O anointed of the Most High. . . ."

So far the Duke had read when a humpbacked, bald, old man looked in at the door. Ludovico smiled, but motioned to him to wait. The head vanished, and the door closed again softly; but the secretary saw he had lost his master's attention. Messer Bartolomeo therefore concluded the letter and went out. The Duke cautiously stepped to the door on the tips of his toes, and called softly:

"Bernardo! Hist! Bernardo!"

"Here, my lord." And the Court poet, Bernardo Bellincioni, advanced with an air of mystery and servility, and he would have fallen on his knees to kiss the Duke's hand; the latter, however, restrained him.

"Well? Well?"

"All is right, my lord."

"Is she brought to bed?"

"Last night saw her released from her burden."

"Felicitously? Or shall I send my physician?"

"Nay, the mother is doing perfectly."

"Glory be to God! And the child?"

"Perfect."

"Male or female?"

"A man-child. And with a voice—! Fair hair as his mother's; but the eyes black, burning and quick like those of Your Grace. The princely blood shows itself. A little Hercules! Madonna Cecilia is beside herself with joy; and bade me inquire the name that will please Your Excellency."

"I have considered that. We will call him Cæsar. What think you of that?"

"'T is a fine name; well mouthing, and ancient. Cesare Sforza! A name meet for a hero."

"Well now—about the husband?"

"The illustrious Count Bergamini is good and courteous as ever."

"Admirable man!" cried the Duke.

"Your Excellency will permit me to pronounce him a man of rare virtue. Such men are to seek nowadays. If the gout permit, he would desire to sup with Your Worship, to testify to his respect."

The Countess Cecilia of whom they spoke had long been Ludovico's mistress. But Beatrice, his bride, daughter of Ercole d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, having discovered the amour, became

furiously jealous; and by threats of return to her paternal home, she induced her lord not only to swear better observance of his conjugal fidelity, but also to bestow Cecilia in wedlock. The husband selected by Ludovico was the ancient and complaisant Count Bergamini.

Bellincioni, taking a small paper from his pocket, presented it to the Duke. It was a sonnet in honour of the newly born:

"Thou weepest, Phœbus! Why this silver rain?
Because this day upon the amazèd skies,
Lo! I have seen a second sun arise,
Before whose splendours all my glories wane."
"This is a tale for laughter!" "Nay, for pain,
Truth suffers no derision from the wise."
"Then tell me more, and still my loud surprise,
That queries whence this newer king shall reign."
"The offspring of a Moor, he makes his nest
In sweet Cecilia's arms—I saw his light
Shine through the brooding feathers of her love;
Now, must I hide me in the cloudy west,
Eclipsed by one more radiant and more bright,
Who shall greater god than Phœbus prove."

The Duke bestowed a silver piece upon the poet.

"Bernardo, let it not slip your memory that Saturday is the birthday of the Duchess."

Bellincioni hastily fumbled in the folds of his courtly but threadbare raiment, and from some recess therein drew forth a whole sheaf of tumbled papers; and among grandiloquent odes on the

death of Madonna Angelina's falcon, and the disorder of Signor Paravincino's dappled Hungarian mare, found the verses required.

"Here be three for my lord to choose from," he said. "I vow by the sacred footprints of Pegasus, you will be content."

In those times sovereigns used their Court poets as musical instruments, to serenade not their mistresses only, but also their wives; fashion demanded that between husband and wife at least platonic love should be assumed.

The Duke ran through the verses curiously, though he could not himself string two lines together. In the first sonnet he found two lines to his taste, where the husband turns to his wife with these words:

"Where thy light spittle falls, flowers gem the earth
As dews of spring bring violets to birth."

In the second the poet, comparing Madonna Beatrice with the goddess Diana, asserted that boars and stags felt happiness in falling by the hand of so fair a huntress. The third poem pleased Il Moro better than all the rest. It was put into the mouth of Dante, who prays that God may permit him to return to earth, since there he would once more find his Beatrice in the person of the Duchess of Milan.

"O great Jove!" cried Alighieri, "since thou hast again given her to the earth that she may

gladden it with the light of love, permit me also to be with her, and to see him whose felicity she is, and whose life she maketh most proud and glad."

Il Moro graciously slapped the poet on his back, and promised him some scarlet Florentine cloth at ten *soldi* the *braccio* for his winter cloak. Bernardo, by no means satisfied, made many bowings and bendings, and obtained at last the promise of some fox skin linings. He explained that his furs had become by long wear as hairless and transparent as vermicelli drying in the sun.

"Last winter," he continued, "I was so cold that I was ready to burn not only my own staircase but the wooden shoes of St. Francis."

The Duke laughed, and promised him firewood, and Bellincioni instantly improvised a laudatory quatrain.

"When to thy servants thou dost promise bread
Like God thou giv'st them heavenly manna,
For which great Phœbus and the choir of nine
Chant, noble Moor, to thee Hosanna."

"You seem in the vein to-day, Bernardo. Hearken, I require yet another poem."

"Erotic?"

"Ay; and impassioned."

"For the Duchess?"

"By no means. But, beware you speak not of this!"

"My lord is pleased to insult me. Have I ever——"

"Not yet."

"I am dumb as any fish," and he blinked his eyes obsequiously and mysteriously. "Impassioned? That I understand. But of what kind? Grateful? Imploring?"

"The last."

The poet drew his brows together with an air of grave solicitude.

"Wedded?"

"A maid."

"Good. But I shall need the name."

"What on earth matters the name?"

"Can't do imploring without the name."

"Madonna Lucrezia.—You have nothing ready?"

"Truly, my lord, I have; but something fresh would please better. Permit me the seclusion of the next apartment; 't will be the affair of a moment. Already I feel the rhymes crawling in my head."

Just then a page announced "Messer Leonardo da Vinci," and Bellincioni disappeared through one door as Leonardo entered at the other.

V

After the opening salutations the Duke and the artist fell to discussing the new canal which was to connect the Sesia and the Ticino, and by a branching network of trenches was to irrigate

the meadows and pastures of the Lomellina. Leonardo was superintendent of the excavations for the canal, though he had not the title of Ducal Architect; neither was he called the Court Painter, but only the *Sonatore di lire*, a title which gave him precedence of the Court poets like Bellincioni, and had been accorded to him because on arrival in Milan he had presented Sforza with a silver lyre, made by his own hand, in the shape of a horse's head.

Having explained his design for the canal, Leonardo requested of the Duke that he might be put in possession of the further moneys necessary for the prosecution of the work.

"How much?" asked Ludovico.

"Five hundred and six ducats for every league: in all, fifteen thousand one hundred and eighty-seven."

Ludovico frowned, remembering the fifty thousand he had just devoted to the corruption of French nobles.

"Too much, too much, Messer Leonardo. You would ruin me. It is impossible, unexampled. Why these boundless designs? I might consult Bramante, you know, who is also an expert in construction. He works more cheaply."

Leonardo shrugged his shoulders.

"As you please, my lord. Entrust it to Bramante."

"Nay, be not offended. I have no thought of slighting you." And they fell to bargaining.

"*Va bene, va bene!*" said the Duke at last, deferring the conclusion of the agreement; and he took up Leonardo's sketch-book and turned over the unfinished drawings, chiefly architectural and mechanical; the artist, somewhat impatient, had to furnish explanations and commentaries.

On one sheet there was a huge mausoleum, an artificial mountain crowned with a colonnaded temple, its dome pierced like that of the Pantheon; on the next, the exact calculations and the ground-plan for the edifice, with details for the disposition of stairs, cells, corridors; the whole being destined for the reception of five hundred sepulchral urns.

"What is this?" asked the Duke; "when and for whom have you designed it?"

"For no one. 'T is a fantasy."

"Strange fantasy!" commented Ludovico, shaking his head; "'t is a cemetery for the gods or the Titans, like a building in a city of dreams."

The next sketch showed the plan for a town with the streets in tiers, one above the other, the upper for the rich, the lower for the poor, for animals, and for refuse: a town to be built in conformity with natural laws; for men without a conscience to be offended by glaring inequality.

"Not so bad!" observed the Duke. "You think it would be practicable?"

"Certainly," said Leonardo, brightening. "I have long wished Your Excellency could be induced to try it, say in one of the suburbs. Five thousand houses would suffice for thirty

thousand people; they would be decently divided, whereas now they herd together in dirt and distemper, disseminating the seeds of disease. My plan, signore, if literally carried out, would provide the finest city in the world."

The Duke's laughter checked the enthusiast.

"You are finely crazed, Messer Leonardo. If I gave you the reins you would turn the state topsy-turvy. You do not see that the most submissive of slaves would resent your two-storied streets, would spit upon your boasted cleanliness—your pipes and conduits—your finest city in the world, *perdio;* and would flee back to their lousy old towns again, where, as you say, they have a good modicum of filth and distemper, but no insults to their self-respect. Well, and this?" he added, pointing to another drawing.

This proved to be a design for a "house of accommodation," with secret rooms, doors, and passages, so disposed that the visitors should not meet each other.

"Ah! this is admirable!" cried the Duke. "I am weary of the robbings and the murderings in these places. Here there would be order and security. I will build at once on your plan." He smiled and added, "Bravo! Bravo! I see nothing is beneath your ingenuity. *A proposito!* I remember once reading of the 'Ear of Dionysius,' a construction at Syracuse, which permitted the tyrant in his palace to hear the speech of his

prisoners in the quarry. Think you it were possible to construct an Ear in my palace?"

As he spoke the Duke had stammered and blushed a little, but he recovered himself immediately: before such a man as this artist no shame was required. And Leonardo, without trenching on morals, eagerly discussed the acoustics of the notion.

Then Bellincioni reappeared, announcing that his sonnet was ready and passing beautiful; at which Leonardo took flight, having accepted the Duke's invitation to supper.

Ludovico requested the poet to read his work. The salamander, so the sonnet ran, lives in the fire, but a lady, of virgin ice, has her dwelling in the lover's fiery heart. The concluding quatrain seemed to the Duke surprisingly tender:

"I sing, poor swan, of my consumèd years,
But singing brings my torture no relief;
Love with his laughter blows the flame of grief,
And mocking cries, 'Extinguish it with tears.'"

VI

While waiting till his consort should have returned from the chase, the Duke took a walk through his domain. He inspected the stables, built like a Greek temple, with columns, porticos, and doubly-lighted windows; the splendid dairy, where he tasted junkets and new-made cheese; then, passing numberless hay-barns and sheds,

came to the farm and the cattle-yards. Here every detail rejoiced his heart: the sound of the milk falling from the udders of his favourite Languedoc cow; the newly-littered sow's motherly gruntings; the smell of honey from the swarming hives. A smile of satisfaction illumined his dark face; truly his home was like a filled goblet! He returned to the house and waited under the gallery. It was towards evening, but not yet the hour of sunset; from the water-meadows of the Ticino came the pungent freshness of the grass. The Duke cast his eyes slowly over his estate: pastures, meadows, fields watered by a network of ditches, planted with long rows of apple, and pear, and mulberry trees, trellised with the hanging garlands of the vines. From Mortara to Abbiategrasso and farther to the very horizon, where in the creeping twilight the snows of Monte Rosa gleamed with unearthly radiance, the boundless plain of Lombardy flowered like the Paradise of God.

"I thank thee, Lord," said the devout Duke raising his eyes heavenward. "I thank thee for all. What more is there that I could desire of thee? Once a barren and leafless wilderness stretched on every side, but I and Leonardo have made these canals, watered this land, and now every blade of grass, every ear of corn blesses me as I bless thee, O Lord!"

Then was heard the tongue of the hounds, and the cry of the huntsmen, and above the vines

Oak Leaves and Acorns (Leonardo da Vinci, Windsor).

Photo by Mansell.

was seen a red lure, a formless object with partridge wings, for bringing back the falcons. Ludovico and his *major domo* went the round of the tables to be sure that all was ready for the evening feast. Presently the Duchess made her entry, and then the guests trooped in, among them Leonardo. A grace was recited, and they sat down to table.

The first course consisted of artichokes sent by express from Genoa, fat eels and carp from the Mantua ponds, gift from Isabella d'Este, and a jelly of the breasts of good capons. The company ate with their fingers and with knives, forks being reserved for state occasions. Certain tiny golden ones with crystal prongs were, however, accorded to the ladies at the fruit course. The munificent host assiduously pressed his guests to eat; and as none ever blushed to be hungry, the food and the liquors circulated freely and long.

Lucrezia had her seat beside the Duchess, and the admiring eyes of the Duke rested on them both. It pleased him that his wife should honour the maiden of his fancy, passing dainties from her own plate to the girl's, and caressing her hand with that expansive and playful tenderness which young women sometimes exhibit towards one another.

The conversation centred in the hunt, and Beatrice told how the sudden burst of a stag from the thicket had almost thrown her from her horse. Much laughter followed when the fool

Gioda, the boaster, told of the boar he had slain, singly, and with superhuman boldness and dexterity. The animal was a tame pig, cast in his path designedly, and the carcase was brought in and exhibited. The fool displayed excesses of rage at these aspersions; but his fury and simplicity were equally assumed. He knew a bad jest from a good one.

By degrees the laughter grew louder, and abundant potations reddened all faces; the ladies surreptitiously loosened their stay-laces. The cellarers brought round light Cyprus wine, both red and white, mulled at the fire, and spiced with pistachios, cinnamon, and cloves. When the Duke called for wine, his command was passed out from one to the other of the stewards in a solemn chant, as of a church function; a goblet was brought from the buffet, and the chief seneschal dipped a talisman—an unicorn on a gold chain—into the liquor. If it were poisoned, the horn of this animal was to turn black and to shed drops of gore. Similar talismans, of toad's-stone and serpent's-tongue, were put in the salt-cellars. Count Bergamini, Cecilia's husband, had been given the seat of honour, and was especially gay to-night, in spite of age and gout. Pointing to the unicorn, he cried:

"I fancy not the King of France has such a horn as your most illustrious Excellency!"

"Hee! hee! hee!" crowed Janachi the hunchback, shaking his rattle and clanging the bells

of his motley cap, surmounted by ass's ears. "Believe him, nuncle, believe him!"

And the Duke good-humouredly threatened the jester with his finger. Now silver trumpets blared to announce the entry of the roasts—boar's head and peacocks. Last came a pasty in the figure of a castle; from its walls sounded a trumpet, and when the crust was cut a dwarf in parrot's plumage sprang out and hopped round the table, till captured and imprisoned in a gilded cage. Thence he screamed out a paternoster.

"Messer," said the Duchess to her lord, "to what joyful event must we attribute the unexpected good fare of this feast?"

Il Moro made no answer, but exchanged sly glances with Count Bergamini. Cecilia's husband understood that the celebration was for the new-born Cesare.

They sat over the boar's head for more than an hour, making no economy of time, and remembering the proverb, "At table none groweth old." At the close of the repast, Fra Talpone caused general hilarity. He was a monk of great corpulence, quarrelled for by princes, being renowned for voracity. He had greatly diverted His Holiness the Pope by devouring the third part of a bishop's cassock, cut in pieces, and steeped in vinegar. Now at a signal from the Duke a huge platter of *buzecchio*—tripe stewed with quinces—was placed before the friar. He sighed, crossed

himself, rolled up his sleeves, and consumed it with relish and incredible rapidity.

"If thou had'st dined with Christ when He divided
The loaves and fishes miracle provided,
No morsel had remained a dog to fill,
Whilst thou unsatisfied had'st hungered still,"

sang Bellincioni on the spur of the moment. Roars of laughter broke from the company. Only the face of the lonely and taciturn Leonardo retained its expression of resigned *ennui.*

When the concluding dish of gilded oranges had been served on silver plates, and handed with Malvoisie, then Antonio Camella da Pistoja, a Court poet, recited an ode in which the Duke was addressed by the Arts and Sciences and Elements in these terms:

"We were slaves; thou camest, and we are free. *Evviva Il Moro!*"

VII

After supper the guests adjourned to the garden called "The Paradise"; laid out in geometrical figures with shorn edgings of box, alleys of laurel and myrtle, shaded walks, labyrinths, loggias, and woven arbours. Rugs and silken pillows were thrown on a lawn freshened by a glittering fountain. The ladies and their cavaliers grouped themselves with relaxing ceremony before the little Court theatre, and an act of the *Miles*

Gloriosus of Plautus was performed. It was tedious, but the audience, out of reverence for the ancients, feigned attention. After the comedy the young people played ball, tennis, and blind-man's-buff, running about, laughing, and catching each other like children among the luxuriant and fragrant roses and orange-trees, while the elders were at dice, draughts, and chess. Others of the company gathered in a close circle on the steps of the fountain, and told *novelli* after the fashion of the youths and ladies of the *Decameron*.

Then they danced to the tune of the favourite air of "Lorenzo dei Medici":

"Quant e bella giovinezza
Ma si fugge tuttavia
Chi vuol esser lieto, sia
Di doman non c'è certezza."

(Fair-fleeting Youth must snatch at happiness;
He knows not if to-morrow curse or bless.)

After the dance Madonna Diana, a gentle girl with a pale and lovely face, sang to the low notes of the lute a plaint on unrequited love. As by enchantment the noise and the laughter ceased, and all listened with thoughtful and reminiscent attention. It was long before any one spoke, and after the ending of the song the hush was broken only by the quiet rustling of the fountain. But presently the voices and the mirth and the music awoke again, and were to be heard till

late at night, when the laurels were lighted by fireflies, and in the darkened heaven reigned the new-born moon. And over all the Paradiso floated a soft air, rich with perfume of orange-blossom; and still trembled the notes of the Medicean canzone:

"Chi vuol esser lieto, sia
Di doman non c'è certezza."

VIII

The Duke saw a glimmer of light in one of the four palace towers. It was the lamp of Messer Ambrogio da Rosate, prime astrologer, and a member of the Secret Council, who was observing the conjunction of Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn in the sign of Aquarius, a matter of profound significance for the house of Sforza.

As if pricked in his memory, the Duke hastily saluted Madonna Lucrezia, with whom he had been engaged in tender discourse, and entered the palace. He looked at the clock, and having awaited the precise minute and second enjoined by the astrologer, swallowed a rhubarb pill, and consulted a calendar in which he read the following note:

"*August 5th*—Eight minutes past ten of the evening, pray heartily on your knees, after folding your hands and raising your eyes to heaven."

Fearing to be late, and so miss the prescription's efficacy, he hurried to the chapel, unlighted

save by a single lamp before a picture. The Duke loved the picture; it was by Leonardo, and represented Cecilia, Countess of Bergamini, arrayed like the Madonna, blessing a hundred-petalled rose. He counted eight minutes by the hour-glass, sank on his knees, folded his hands, and recited the *Confiteor*. He prayed long and fervently, his eyes on the picture.

"Mother of God," he murmured, "protect, save, and have mercy on me, on my son Massimiliano, and Cesare, the newly-born. I commend unto thee Beatrice, my consort, and Madonna Cecilia. And likewise Gian Galeazzo, my nephew, for thou see'st my heart, and knowest that I wish no evil to my nephew, though it may be that his death would set free not only my state, but all Italy."

Here he remembered the proof of his right to his throne which he had obtained from the jurisconsult, and which stated that his elder brother (father of Gian Galeazzo) having been born unto Francesco Sforza, the *condottiere*, before he became Francesco Sforza and Duke of Milan, whereas Ludovico was born unto the said Francesco *after* he had become Duke—the younger not the elder was obviously the heir to the ducal dignities of the common father.

At this moment, however, the decision seemed to Ludovico rather ingenious than convincing. He hesitated to put it before the Mother of God, contenting himself thus:

"If in anything I have sinned or shall sin before thee, O Queen of Heaven, thou knowest that I do so not for myself but for the good of my people and of Italy. Mediate for me with God, and I will glorify thee by the building in splendour of the cathedral in this town of Milan, and of the Certosa at Pavia, and of other glorious monuments."

After his prayer, candle in hand, he went toward his bed-chamber, passing through the dark rooms of the sleeping palace. In one of them, however, he encountered Madonna Lucrezia.

"Truly, the god of Love favours me!" he thought.

"Signore!" exclaimed the girl; her voice broke, she would have thrown herself on her knees before him, as she added, "have pity on me, my lord!"

And she told him that her brother Matteo Crivelli, chief of the chamberlains, a man of abandoned life but whom she devotedly loved, had lost at play great sums of the public money.

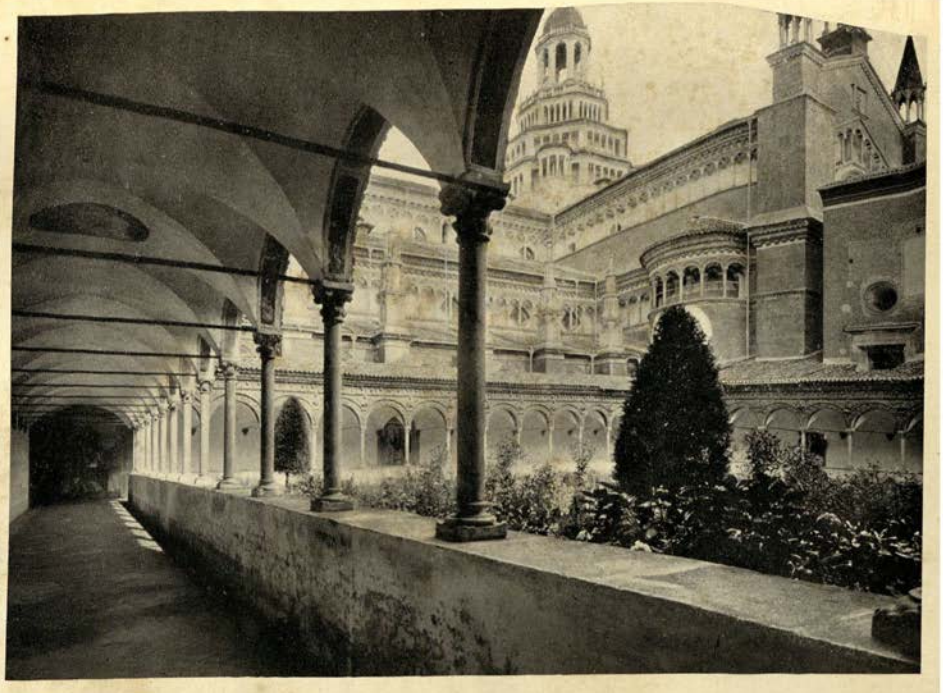
"Fear not, madonna! I will save your brother."

He was silent for a moment, and added with a deep sigh:

"And you too, O madonna, will you not be to me less cruel?"

She looked questioningly at him with serene and innocent eyes.

"I do not understand you, signore. What is your meaning?"



Certosa di Pavia.

Photo by Brogi.

Her modesty rendered her yet fairer.

"It means, my sweet," he said, throwing his arm almost roughly round her, "it means—but, Lucrezia, have you not seen that I love you?"

"Loose me! Let me go! What do you, signore! Madonna Beatrice——"

"Shall not know!" said the Duke.

"No, my lord, no. She is so good, so generous to me. Leave me, for pity's sake——"

"I will save your brother—do all your desire—be your slave. Only have pity on me."

And half sincere in his passion and his tears, he murmured in trembling tones those lines of the poet's:

"I sing, poor swan, of my consumèd years,
But singing brings my torture no relief;
Love with his laughter blows the flame of grief,
And mocking cries, 'Extinguish it with tears.'"

"Let me go! Let me go!" said the girl desperately.

But he bent over her, feeling the freshness of her breath, the perfume of violet and musk, and forcibly kissed her on the lips. For one moment Lucrezia languished in his embrace, then, with a despairing cry, broke from him and fled.

IX

Having reached the nuptial apartment, he found the lamp extinguished, and Beatrice al-

ready reposing in the huge, mausoleum-like couch on a dais in the middle of the floor under a blue silk baldachin. It was adorned with silver curtains, and a coverlet, costly as the vestment of a priest, of cloth of gold and pearls.

"Bice," he whispered caressingly; "Bice, dost thou sleep?" and he would have saluted her, but she repulsed him.

"Bice,—why is this?"

"Leave me in peace; I am fain of sleep."

"But why, dear one, why? If thou knew'st how I adore thee!"

"Yes, yes, I know you adore us all together. Your consort, and Cecilia, and *perdio!* the Muscovy slave-woman, the red-haired fool whom you kissed in the obscurer angle of my wardrobe room!"

"'T was a jest."

"A jest I care not for."

"Alas, Bice, these many days thou hast been harsh to me! Well, I confess it—I am guilty; 't was a scurvy jest—a caprice."

"Your caprices, my lord, are many." She turned towards him angrily. "How is it you have no shame? Why, why these lies? Do I not know you?—read you to the soul? I would not have you think this jealousy; but I will not—hear you, my lord?—I *will not* be one among your lemans."

"I swear to thee, Bice, I have loved none save thee. By my soul's eternal weal, I swear it."

She was silent, surprised less by his words than by the tone in which they were uttered. He was not wholly lying. The more he deceived her the more he felt he loved her, as if passion were inflamed by fear, qualms of conscience, pity, and remorse.

"Pardon, Bice, pardon," he implored; "consider my love for thee——"

She submitted herself; and as he embraced her, invisible in the darkness, he remembered serene and innocent eyes, and a perfume of freshness, of violet and musk; the two loves confused themselves in an exquisite sensation.

"Truly to-day thou art something like a lover!" she said with inward pride.

"Of a truth, dear one; it is still as it was in our first days——"

"Foolishness!" cried Beatrice, laughing. "Fie on this trifling. Rather should'st thou be thinking of deeper matters. It seems as though *his* health were mending."

"Nay, 't is but few days since Luigi Marliani assured me there was no hope for him," replied the Duke; "'t is true we have now a little amendment, but it will not be for long; he is doomed beyond remission."

"Who can tell?" urged Beatrice; "he is overtended. Of a truth, Ludovico, I marvel at your patience. You bear insults like a sheep. You say 'The power is in our hands,' but were it not better to renounce power at once than to tremble

for it night and day like thieves; to lick the dust before that haughty bastard who is the King of France; to be slaves at the mercy of the impudent Alfonso; to weary ourselves in propitiating that perfidious sorceress of Aragon! They say she is pregnant again: a new serpent will come forth from that cursed nest. And to fare thus for our whole lives! Consider, Ludovico, for our whole lives! And you call that having the power in our own hands!"

"But the physicians constantly aver," repeated the Duke, "that this malady is incurable; sooner or later——"

"Ay, 't is later then. For ten years he hath been dying."

There was a silence. Suddenly she threw her beautiful arm round his neck, and drawing herself to him, she whispered in his ear—words which made him shudder.

"Bice! may Christ and his most holy Mother pardon thee! Never—dost heed me?—never again speak to me of that."

"You are afraid, perhaps? Would you wish *me* to try?"

He did not answer, but asked presently:

"Of what thinkest thou?"

"My lord," she answered, "I am thinking about peaches."

"Ay; I have bidden the gardener send thee of the ripest."

"I care not for them. My thought was of the

peaches of Messer Leonardo. Hast thou heard aught of those?"

"What should I have heard?"

"That they be poisoned."

"How poisoned?"

"'T is true. He hath poisoned them himself by magic, for his experiments. Monna Sidonia told me; wonderfully beautiful peaches!"

And again they were silent, embracing thus in the stillness and the dark; their thoughts united, each listening to the quickened beat of the other's heart—no further speech needed. At last Il Moro, with almost paternal tenderness, kissed his young wife on the brow, and made the sign of the cross.

"Sleep, dear one," he said, "sleep in peace."

That night the Duchess saw in her dreams fair peaches on a platter of gold. She proved one and found it succulent and toothsome; but of a sudden a voice cried unto her:

"Poison! poison!" and again, "Poison!"

The Duke likewise dreamed his dream. And in it he fancied himself walking on the shining lawn beside the fountain. And before him at a little distance he saw three women, white-clad and embracing like fair sisters. And nearing himself, he perceived the one to be Beatrice, and the second Lucrezia, and the third Cecilia. He thanked his God that at last they were friends; but in his heart he blamed them that they had not been friends from the first.

X

The clock in the castle tower struck the hour of midnight and everywhere was the silence of sleep, saving only on the *altana*, where the Duchess was wont to gild her hair; for thither Morgantina, the dwarf, had fled, having escaped from the closet in which she had been confined; there, alone in the darkness, she bewailed the loss of her baby.

"They have slain me my son! And wherefore, O Lord, wherefore? He had done no wrong to any one; he alone comforted me!"

The night was serene; the air so pure, so transparent, that against the horizon the icy summits of the Alps were visible, like everlasting crystals. The stillness was long perturbed by the mournful cries of the madwoman, like the keening of some bird of evil omen. Suddenly she gave a sigh, raised her eyes to heaven, and was silent.

The stillness of death followed; and the fool smiled at the stars which, far above in the measureless blue of a summer night, were shining upon her—innocently and mysteriously shining.

BOOK IV

THE WITCHES' SABBATH—1494

"Heaven above—heaven below,
Stars above—stars below,
All which is over man—under him shows;
Glory to him who the riddle readeth!"

TABULA SMARAGDINA.

I

IN an obscure outskirt of Milan, near the Porta Vercellina, the Customs House, and the canal called the Acqua Cantarana, stood an old house, very solitary, and remarkable for the smoke which day and night ascended in large spirals from an immense, winding, and blackened chimney. Here dwelt Monna Sidonia, the wise woman. The upper floor she hired to Messer Galeotto Sacrobosco, an alchemist; and in the lower she lived herself with Cassandra, his niece, the young daughter of Luigi Sacrobosco, a celebrated traveller, who had traversed Greece, the islands of the Archipelago, Syria, Asia Minor, and Egypt, in the quest for specimens of ancient art. He possessed himself of all that came to hand: a Greek marble, or a trifle of amber, a sham in-

scription from the tomb of Homer, a new tragedy by Euripides, or a peroration by Demosthenes. Some thought him a great man, but others dubbed him an impostor; and not a few believed him crazy. His imagination was so enthralled by pagan recollections that though to the last a good Catholic, he prayed to the Olympian Hermes, and regarded Wednesday (*Mercoledi*) his day, as one singularly propitious for mercantile ventures. No toil, no privations, daunted him in his enterprises. On one occasion, having already put out ten leagues to sea, he returned to copy an inscription of which accident had informed him. Having lost his collection in a shipwreck, his hair turned white with grief. If asked why he so plagued himself and spent his days in such sore labour, he always replied:

"I desire to raise the dead."

In the little town of Mistra, near the ruins of Lacedæmon, he met a maiden of extraordinary beauty, resembling the statues of Artemis. She was the daughter of a poor and drunken village deacon. Luigi married her and took her to Italy with a new copy of the *Iliad*, the fragments of a Hecate, and the shreds of an earthenware amphora.

To the pair was born a daughter, whom they called Cassandra, Luigi being at that time impassioned for Æschylean tragedy. The wife died and the father was off on his wanderings, so the child was left to the care of Demetrius Chalcondylas, a learned Greek from Constantinople who

had been brought to Milan by the Sforzas. This old man of seventy, a double-faced, cunning, and secretive person, pretended a vast zeal for the Catholic Church; in his heart, however, like Cardinal Bessarione, and most of the immigrant Greeks, he was a disciple of the last of the masters of the ancient wisdom, Gemistus Pletho, the Replete with Learning, the Neoplatonist who had died forty years before at Mistra, where Luigi had become enamoured of his Artemis. This man had been affirmed by his disciples to be a re-incarnation of the illustrious Plato himself; the theologians, on the contrary, maintained that he had revived the anti-Christian heresies of Julian the Apostate, and that he was to be fought not by argument and controversy, but by the Inquisition and the stake. Chiefly they accused him on account of certain words uttered to his disciples three years before his death. He had said: "But a few years after I shall have died, one sole Truth shall reign over all peoples and nations, and men shall unite in the single faith" (*unam eandemque religionem universum orbem esse suscepturam*). Being questioned whether he meant the faith of Christ or of Mahomet, he answered: "Neither the one nor yet the other, but a faith which in naught shall differ from the ancient paganism" (*neutram, inquit, sed a gentilitate non differentem*).

Cassandra was bred by Chalcondylas in strict though feigned Christian piety. Overhearing, how-

ever, much neoplatonic talk, and not understanding its philosophical subtleties, the maid wove for herself a fantastic dream of the coming resurrection of the gods. On her breast she wore a talisman against fever, a present from her father; it was a gem representing Dionysus as a naked youth, with thyrsus and vine-branch, a rearing panther trying to lick the grapes in his hand. Sometimes, when quite alone, she would hold her amethyst up to the sun and gaze into its purple depths until her head swam, and she saw the god in a vision, living, and ever young and adorable.

Messer Luigi ruined himself at last in his quest for treasures, and died miserably of a putrid fever in a shepherd's hut beside the ruins of a Phœnician temple, which he had himself discovered. Soon after, Galeotto, his brother, who also had wandered for many years in pursuit, not of antiquities but of the philosopher's stone, came to Milan, established himself in the little house by the Vercellina gate, and took his niece to live with him.

She still, however, frequented the house of Chalcondylas, and thither came Giovanni Boltraffio to execute some copying for Messer Giorgio Merula.

Encountering Cassandra again, Giovanni remembered the talk he had overheard between her and Zoroastro about the poisoned tree, and he shuddered. Many told him the maiden was a sorceress, but her charm was not to be resisted,

and almost every evening when his work was done he sought her in the lonely cottage by the Vercellina gate. They sat on a hillock together above the dark and silently swift waters of the canal, not far from the sluice gates near the convent of St. Radegonda. A scarce visible path, tangled with elder-bushes, wormwood, and nettles, led to the little hillock; no one ever passed that way, and there the two met and loitered and talked long together.

II

It was a sultry evening; at rare intervals a gust came flying, raising the white dust and rustling in the leaves. It passed by, leaving the stillness stiller than before. Nothing was heard but the dull, seemingly subterranean growl of distant thunder, and against this low, threatening, and solemn roar, the broken shrillness of a lute and the drunken song of the customs-collector celebrating the Sunday feast in the neighbouring tavern. At times a flash broke across the clouds, and then for a moment the little house with the brick chimney, and the black smoke of the alchemist's furnace, the long lean sacristan fishing from the bank, the straight canal with the rows of larches and willows, the flat-bottomed barges from the Lago Maggiore bringing white marble for the cathedral, and drawn by sorry horses, their loose towing-ropes and the long whips of the

drivers dipping in the water—all stood out sharp and clear against the prevailing blackness. All was again wrapped in gloom, save for the alchemist's fire always vividly glowing. It was reflected in the Cantarana, whence came noisome odours of stagnant back-waters, rotting fern-leaves, tar, and decaying wood.

Giovanni and Cassandra were in their accustomed haunt.

"'T is tedious!" cried the girl, stretching herself wearily and snapping her delicate white fingers behind her head; "every day the same dull round. To-day as yesterday, and to-morrow as to-day. That same foolish sacristan catching nothing; the same filthy smoke from Messer Galeotto's workshop, where he, too, eternally seeks what he will never find; the same boats towed by the same hateful horses; the same cracked lute! Ah, if it would but change! If the French would come and rid us of Milan! if the sacristan would catch a fish, or my uncle find some gold. *Dio mio!* what weariness!"

"I know!" cried Giovanni. "I also at times find life so wearisome that I am fain to die. But Fra Benedetto taught me a prayer very prevalent against the demon of discontent. Shall I recite it for you?"

"Nay, Giovanni. It is long since I have been able to pray to your God."

"My God? What god is there but my God —the only God?"

A quick flash, like the lightning of the storm, illumined her face; never had it seemed to him so mystic, so unearthly, so fair. She was silent for a time, passing her hand over the dark aureole of her hair.

"Hearken, friend. It was long ago—yonder—in my native land. I was scarce more than a babe. My father had taken me with him on a journey. We visited the ruins of an ancient temple. They stood high on a promontory; the sea was around us and the screaming gulls; the waves were breaking endlessly on black rocks, sharp as needles, and covered with salt foam, which rose and fell, running off the sharp points of the rocks in a seething stream. He found a half-faded inscription on the fragment of a marble slab. I sat long alone on the temple steps, listening to the sea and breathing in its freshness, mixed with the scent of the sea-herbs. Then I went into the abandoned shrine. The columns were yellow, but scarce crumbled by time, and between them the azure sky seemed dark. There were poppies growing in the crevices between the stones—pink poppies—the poppies of Greece! It was quite still, but for that muffled roar of the waves which filled the temple as if with the voices of prayer. And I fell on my knees and prayed to the god who had once been enshrined there—unknown and now rejected by men. I kissed his marble steps, and I wept and loved him because no one on earth loved him any more, nor prayed to him—

because he was dead. Never since have I prayed so fervently! And that temple—it was the temple of DIONYSUS!"

"By the love of God, Cassandra, what are you saying? This Dionysus, whom you call god, exists not, nor did exist."

"Did he not?" cried the girl, scornfully; "then why teach the holy fathers, whom you reverence, that the gods, banished in the days of the conquering Jesus, were changed into most potent demons? How could Giorgio da Novara, the great astronomer, learn by exact observation that the conjunction of Jupiter with Saturn produced the teaching of Moses; with Mars, that of the Chaldeans; with Venus, that of Mahomet; with Mercury, that of Christ; and that conjunction with the moon—future for him—would bring the teaching of Antichrist and the resurrection of the gods?"

The storm was drawing nearer, the thunder roared louder, the flashes grew ever brighter, heavy clouds were spreading overhead, yet still the broken lute sobbed forth its insistent melody on the threatening air.

"O madonna!" cried Boltraffio, clasping his hands, "do you not see that 't is the Devil who is tempting you that he may lure you to the abyss? Eternal curses upon him!"

The girl turned, laid both hands on his shoulders, and said:

"And does he not tempt you also? Why did

you leave your sainted teacher, Benedetto? Why did you enter into the school of the impious Leonardo? What brings you hither unto me? Do you not know I am a witch? Are you not affrighted lest you lose your soul talking here with me?"

"The strength of the Lord defend us!" he stammered, shuddering.

She silently drew near him, fixing him with her wondrous eyes. At that moment the lightning rent the cloud and flashed on her pale face. Was she the goddess who had risen before Giovanni's awestruck gaze from her tomb on the Hill of the Mill?

"'Tis she!" he thought in terror. "She has found me again, the White She-Devil!"

He would have risen, but his forces seemed to have left him. He felt the girl's hot breath on his cheek, and listened as she whispered:

"Will you that I reveal everything to you? Will you fly with me thither where He is? Ah, it is good there! *There* is no weariness; nothing maketh ashamed. There all things are permitted as in Paradise!"

A cold sweat broke out on Giovanni's brow but curiosity impelled him, and in a low voice he asked:

"Where?"

"*Al Sabbato!*" she answered with passionate languor, her lips almost touching his cheek.

A peal of thunder, now quite overhead, shook

earth and sky, rolling through the air in majestic reverberation, like the laugh of unseen giants. Then slowly it died away into the great silence.

And then rang out the melancholy peaceful sound of the convent bell, the evening Angelus. Giovanni made the sign of the cross.

"It is late," said the girl, rising; "I must return homeward. Do you see those torches, there on the road? 'T is the Duke coming to visit Messer Galeotto, who is to show him an interesting experiment with lead. He thinks it can be turned into gold."

True it was, the tramping of hoofs was heard coming from the Porta Vercellina. Cassandra lingered for a moment, then darted through the tangled elder-bushes and disappeared.

III

Messer Galeotto had consumed his whole life in the search for the philosopher's stone. Having finished his medical course at Bologna University, he had entered as *famulus* the service of Count Bernardo Trevisani, renowned as an adept in the occult sciences. Afterwards, for fifteen years, he had sought the transforming mercury in all possible substances: in volatile salts, bismuth, arsenic, human blood, gall, and hair, in animals and plants. In this fashion the six thousand ducats of his patrimony had been dissipated in the smoke which ascended from his chimney.

He must needs live on the wealth of others. Money-lenders cast him into prison; he escaped, and for eight years experimented with eggs, destroying some twenty thousand. Next he studied copperas with Maestro Enrico, the papal pronotary, fell ill from the poisonous fumes, lay in bed for fourteen months, and, deserted by every one, came near dying. Having endured all humiliations and persecutions, starvation, beggary, contempt, and even judicial torture, he wandered as an itinerant artificer through France, Spain, the countries of the Empire, Holland, Greece, Persia, Palestine, Northern Africa. At last, old and worn out, but not yet disillusioned, he returned to Lombardy, where Il Moro promised him the office of Court alchemist.

At Milan, in the lonely cottage by the Porta Vercellina, he had set up his laboratory. It was a large chamber, in the middle of which was a clumsy stove of fire-proof earth divided into compartments, and fitted with valves, crucibles, and bellows. In one corner of the room was a pile of refuse. The working-table was heaped with every sort of complicated apparatus, cubes, rectifiers, receivers, retorts, funnels, mortars, test tubes, bottles, baths. A pungent smell was given off by poisonous alkalis and acids. Here the seven gods of Olympus, the seven heavenly planets, a whole occult and mystic universe had its counterpart in metal: the sun in gold, the moon in silver, Venus in brass; Mars, iron; Saturn, lead; Jupiter, tin; and Mercury in quick-

silver. Here were substances with barbaric names which struck terror into the profane. Here were wolf's milk, the iron of Achilles, anacardines, asterites (clear-shining stones, having in the midst an image of a full moon), androgyna, and rhaponticum, aristolochia or hart-wort (for giving ease in childbirth), and a priceless drop of the blood of a lion which had cost years to obtain, a gem, red as a ruby, which cures all diseases and blesses with eternal youth.

At his table sat the alchemist, meagre, small, wrinkled as an old mushroom, but still alert and tireless. His head supported on his two hands, Messer Galeotto was gazing intently at a retort, in which with low noise and bubbling was burning oil of Venus, a clear green fluid. The candle that burned by the philosopher's side sent an emerald light through the retort on an ancient parchment folio, a work by the Arab chemist, Djabira Abdallah.

Hearing voices and footsteps on the stair, Galeotto rose, threw a glance round the laboratory to make sure all was ready, signed to his silent *famulus* to throw fuel on the furnace, and sallied forth to meet his guests.

IV

They were a merry company of knights and dames, just risen from supper and Malvoisie. Leonardo was there, and Marliani, the Court

Leonardo da Vinci, Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

Photo by Alinari.

physician, a man profoundly versed in alchemy. The ladies entered, and the quiet cell of the student was filled with perfumes, with the rustle of silk, with light chatter and laughter like the hum of birds. One damsel overturned a retort with her hanging sleeve, another meddling with a piece of iron slag cut her dainty glove, another spilt the mercury on the table and screamed with delight on seeing the living silver drops.

"And shall we really see Messer Satan in the fire at the moment of the lead's conversion?" asked Madonna Filiberta of her Spanish lover; "is it not a sin to assist at such experiments?"

The alchemist whispered in Leonardo's ear:

"Believe me, Messere, I hold myself much honoured by your visit." And he warmly clasped his hand, adding before Leonardo could respond:

"Oh, I know, I know! 'T is a secret from the crowd; but we understand each other, do we not?"

Then with a smile of great affability he said aloud:

"With license from my most illustrious protector, the renowned Duke, and of all these loveliest ladies, I will adventure now to exhibit the divine metamorphosis. Will you all condescend to lend me your honourable attention?"

First he showed his crucible, a melting-pot with thick sides of fire-proof clay; he begged each one to examine it, and tap it, and convince himself there was no concealed deception, while he animadverted on the frauds of pretended philosophers

who were wont to have vessels with false bottoms in which gold had been placed, not made. He also craved inspection of the pewter, the fuel, the bellows, and all else, to prove his good faith. Then the lead was chopped into small pieces and consigned to the crucible, which was then put on the hottest place of the furnace. The silent, cross-eyed *famulus*—so pale, corpse-like, and surly that one of the ladies near fainted, believing him the expected Messer Satan—began to work a huge pair of bellows, and the fire quickly leaped into flame. Galeotto meanwhile entertained his visitors with conversation, and awakened general mirth by calling his science of alchemy *casta meretrix*, who had many lovers but deluded them all, offered easy conquest to everybody, but had so far yielded to the embraces of none.

Luigi Marliani, the Court physician, a fat, taciturn, gloomy man with a dignified and intelligent face, lost patience with this chatter, and wiping his brow, cried out:

"Messer Galeotto, methinks 't is time for business. Your metal is already bubbling."

Galeotto opened a little blue paper packet which contained a bright yellow powder, viscous and sparkling, like highly polished glass. It had a strong smell of burnt sea-salt. This was the momentous tincture, the long-sought, priceless jewel of alchemy, the wonder-working *lapis philosophorum.*

With the point of a knife he detached a speck

of the powder no larger than a turnip-seed, wrapped it in a ball of beeswax, and tossed it into the boiling pewter.

"And what do you consider the strength of that solution?" asked Marliani.

"One to two thousand eight hundred and twenty of the metal to be converted," replied Galeotto. "Naturally my solution is not yet perfected, but shortly, I hope, the figures will be one to a million. Then it will suffice to take of it the weight of a grain of millet, to dissolve it in a barrel of water containing the parings of a hazel-nut, and finally, to sprinkle your vines therewith; in result you will have your vintage in May. *Mare tingerem si Mercurius esset.* I would turn the sea into gold had I competency in quicksilver."

Marliani turned away with a shrug. This bombast infuriated him, and he hinted the impossibility of such transformations by arguments supported by Aristotle.

"Have patience, *domine magister*," said Galeotto, with a smile; "in a little space I will propound to you such a syllogism as not all your logic can confute."

Therewith he threw a handful of white powder in the fire. Clouds of thick smoke filled the laboratory. Hissing and crackling, up leapt a many-coloured flame, changing like a rainbow from blue to green, from red to yellow. The spectators were alarmed, and Filiberta afterward swore that at the instant the flame was purple, she

saw in it the face of the Devil. The alchemist with a long hooked iron raised the lid of the crucible. The metal, white-hot, bubbled and hissed and gurgled. Then the lid was replaced; the bellows soughed and whistled, and when ten minutes later a thin iron rod was dipped into the molten liquid, all saw hanging on its end a yellow drop.

"Ready!" cried the alchemist.

The pot was now removed from the furnace and allowed to cool. Then before the astounded spectators, there fell from it, sparkling and resounding on the earthen floor, a bar of gold. The alchemist pointed dramatically, and exclaimed:

"*Solve mihi hunc syllogismum!*"

"Unheard of! Incredible! Against all the laws of nature and of logic!" murmured Marliani in stupefaction.

The face of Galeotto was white, his eyes glowed with the fire of inspiration, and looking up to heaven, he cried:

"*Laudetur Deus in æternum!* Praise God in eternity who deigns to give part of his infinite power unto us, the most abject of his creatures."

The gold was tested with sulphuric acid. It proved to be purer than the finest of Hungary or Arabia. The company pressed about the venerable philosopher, congratulating him, and wringing his hands. Il Moro took him aside.

"You serve me in fidelity and truth, Messer Galeotto?"

"I would I had more lives than one, that I might dedicate them all to Your Excellency," replied the alchemist.

"Then, Galeotto, beware lest any of the other princes——"

"*Illustrissimo*, if there be one of them who shall get even a scent of it, have me hanged for a hound." And after a pause he added, bowing very low, "I would pray of Your Excellency——"

"What? Again?"

"God is my witness, 't is for the last time."

"How much?"

"Five thousand ducats."

The Duke reflected, reduced the sum by a thousand, and promised. It was now late; Madonna Beatrice might be anxious; the company hastened to take their leave, each one receiving from the alchemist a fragment of the new-made gold. Only Leonardo remained behind.

V

When they were alone Galeotto said to him, "Well, Master, what think you of my experiment?"

"The gold was in the rods," replied Leonardo, dryly.

"What rods? What do you mean, sir?"

"The rods with which you stirred the molten metal. I saw all."

"Did you not yourself examine all my utensils?"

"These rods were not those we examined."

"Not those! Master, permit me——"

"Have I not told you I saw everything?" repeated Leonardo, with a smile. "Be not obstinate, Galeotto. The gold was concealed in hollow rods tipped with wood. When the wooden ends were consumed in the molten mass, the gold fell into it."

The old man's legs shook; over his face spread a look at once abject and pathetic. Leonardo touched him on the shoulder.

"Fear not, Messer Galeotto, none shall know. I am no tale-bearer."

The impostor seized his hand feverishly and cried:

"You will not betray me?"

"No. I wish you no ill. But, Messer Galeotto, why these frauds?"

"Oh, Messer Leonardo," cried the other, and immediately the boundless despair in his eyes was transfigured by a flash of hope, "I swear to you by God, that if I seem to have practised deception, 't is but for the welfare of the duchy, for the triumph of science, and because my deception shall endure but a brief space. For, Messer Leonardo, truth it is that I have verily found the philosopher's stone. I do not assert that I have it yet in my possession, but I know that it already exists. That is to say, it as good as exists; for I have found the way and you know that the way is everything. Three or four more experiments, and lo! it is accomplished. What was I to do,

Messere? Is not the discovery of so grand a truth justification for so small a deception?"

"Nay, Messer Galeotto," replied Leonardo, gravely, "to what purpose would you play with me at blind-man's-buff? You know right well, even as I know, that the transmutation of metals is a baseless dream: that there is no philosopher's stone, nor can be one. Alchemy, necromancy, black magic, all these sciences not founded on mathematics and exact experiment are delusion or deception—flags of charlatans, swelled but by the bellying of the wind, after which runs the gaping herd, applauding it knows not what."

His eyes round and bright with astonishment, the alchemist hung on the lips of the Master, and when Leonardo stopped he did not reply. Presently, however, he nodded his head intelligently and winked.

"Ah! ah! Messer Leonardo, but this will not serve. Am I not of the initiated? And do we not all know that thou thyself art the prince of alchemists, the possessor of the most recondite mysteries of nature, the new Hermes Trismegistus, the new Prometheus?"

"I?"

"Thou thyself, Master."

"Call you this jesting, Messer Galeotto?"

"Contrariwise. 'T is you, Messer Leonardo, who would jest. How astute and impenetrable you are! In my time I have seen many who were jealous of their secrets of science, never an one like you."

Leonardo looked at him searchingly; he strove in vain to be angry. He smiled involuntarily.

"Do you seriously believe in these arts?" he asked.

"Do I believe in them? Messere, if God himself came to me hither at this moment and said to me, 'Galeotto, there is no philosopher's stone,' I should answer him: 'Lord, even as it is true that thou hast created me, so is it true that there *is* that stone, and that I shall find it.'"

After this Leonardo disputed no more, but listened with interest to the speculations of the alchemist. Presently the talk swerved to the possible assistance of the Devil in the occult sciences; the old man, however, would none of this. He declared the Devil to be the weakest, the most miserable, the most impotent of all the creations of God; he himself had faith only in the human mind, and believed that to science all things were possible.

Then suddenly, without any consciousness of an abrupt transition, and as if playing with some agreeable and diverting recollection, he asked whether Messer Leonardo had frequent apparitions of elemental spirits. And when his interlocutor confessed to never having seen any, Galeotto again refused to believe him; and with relish told how the salamander has a body a finger and a half in length, spotted, thin, and harsh, while the sylphide is blue as the sky, transparent, and ethereal. He spoke also of the nymphs and undines that live

in the rivers and the sea; of the gnomes, pygmies, and underground dwarfs; of the durgans and dryads, dwellers in trees, and the rare spirits that inhabit precious stones.

"I cannot convey to you," concluded Galeotto, "how beneficent and exquisite are these genii!"

"Why, then," asked Leonardo, "do they appear only to the elect?"

"Would you have them appear to all? They dread vulgar persons, libertines, materialists, drunkards, and gluttons. They affect the innocent, the childlike, simple ones. They live only where there is no malice nor cunning. Timid and fearful as gazelles, they take refuge from human eyes in their native elements."

And a smile of infinite tenderness illuminated the old man's face, as if at the memory of long-ago dreams.

"What a charming old fool!" thought Leonardo, no longer scornful, but ready to simulate participation in any scientific absurdity to please this man whom now he treated with affectionate consideration, like a child.

They parted as friends; and the moment he was alone the alchemist plunged into new experiments with the oil of Venus.

VI

All this time Monna Sidonia, the mistress of the house, and Cassandra sat before an immense

open fireplace in the room below Messer Galeotto's laboratory. Their supper of coarse vegetables was stewing on the hearth, and the old woman with unvarying motion of her wrinkled finger spun the linen thread with her distaff. Cassandra watched her idly and thought:

"Always the same thing. To-day as yesterday, to-morrow as to-day. The cricket chirps, the mouse squeaks, the spindle hums. There is a crackling in the dry sticks on the hearth, and I smell turnips and garlic."

Presently the old woman began prating in her usual way; saying that she was not rich, whatever the people might say about her money-pot buried in the vineyard. That was all an idle tale. The truth was, she was ruining herself for Galeotto and his niece. She had too much heart, that was it, or she would never keep them, the two of them hanging on to her neck like a pair of millstones. And of a truth Cassandra was no longer a child, and ought to be thinking of the future; her uncle would die some day or other, and leave her as poor as Job. She might at least get a husband. She might at least accept the hand of the rich horse-dealer at Abbiategrasso, who had the folly to run after her. He was not young, but he was a staid, God-fearing man without any bees in his bonnet; had a good business, and a mill, and an olive-press. What more did she want?

Cassandra listened in silence; but tedium sat on her like a nightmare; seized her by the throat and

suffocated her. She felt an irresistible longing to break out into rebellious weeping and rage.

Monna Sidonia fished in the pot for a succulent turnip, mashed it up with grape-juice, and munched with apparent appetite; but the young girl, submissive though with growing desperation, stretched herself and interlaced her fingers behind her hair. After supper the old woman, like a wearied Fate, nodded over her distaff, and her talk died down into disconnected mumbling. Then Cassandra drew forth her talisman, and the firelight shining through its purple depths, she studied the figure of the naked god, and her heart filled with love for the beautiful Hellenic deities.

She sighed heavily, concealed her amulet, and said diffidently:

"Monna Sidonia! to-night at Barco di Ferrara and at Benevento there is the gathering. Aunt! good kind aunt! we will not dance. We will go only to see. We will come back at once. I will do whatever you wish; I will even try to get a present out of the horsedealer—only be kind for once. Let us fly! let us fly together—now—at once!"

And the girl's eyes sparkled hungrily. The beldame surveyed her curiously; then her blue and withered lips parted in a smile which displayed her one tusk-like yellow tooth, and her face lit up with a hideous joy.

"Ah, you wish it? Very much, do you? You have caught the taste? Was there ever such a

girl? For my part, I am ready to fly every night. But see you here, Cassandra, you take the sin on your own soul. To-night I was n't even thinking of it. I 'll do it only for your sake, out of my too great goodness of heart."

Without haste the old woman went about the room, shut the shutters, stuffed rags into the chinks, locked all doors, poured water on the fire, lighted a black candle endued with magical properties, and from an iron locker took an earthen vessel containing a pungent ointment. She made show of being deliberate and sensible, but her hands shook as though she were drunk, her sunken eyes were at times turbid, at times they sparkled like coals. Cassandra had dragged the two great troughs used for the kneading of dough into the centre of the room.

Now Monna Sidonia stripped herself, and sitting astride of a broomstick on one of the troughs, she smeared herself with the ointment which she had taken from the locker. A hideous odour filled the room; the medicament, infallible for making witches fly, was composed of poisonous lettuce, hemlock, nightshade, mandragora, poppy, henbane, serpent's blood, and the fat of unchristened children.

Cassandra could not look at the hag's deformity. At the eleventh hour she recoiled.

"What are you about?" grumbled the crone; "are you going to leave me to fly alone? Come—make haste. Take your clothes off."

"All right. But, Monna Sidonia, put the light out. I can't do it in the light."

"Bah! what modesty! Never mind, there 'll be no modesty on the mountain."

She blew out the candle, making the sign of the cross with the left hand for the pleasing of the Devil, her master.

Then the girl rapidly undressed, knelt in the trough, and smeared herself.

In the darkness the old woman was heard mumbling the senseless disconnected words of an incantation.

"Emen Hetan, Emen Hetan, Palu, Baalberi, Astaroth, help us. Agora, Agora, Patrisa, come and help us!"

Cassandra eagerly snuffed the strong odour of the unguent. Her skin burned; her head swam; delicious thrills ran down her back. Red and green interlacing circles swam before her eyes; she heard the abandoned stridulous voice of Monna Sidonia as if from afar.

"Garr-r! Garr-r-r! Up! Up! Don't knock your head! We fly! We fly!"

VII

Forth from the chimney-top flew Cassandra astride on the soft hide of a black goat. Ravished, panting, with exaltation filling her soul, she screamed like a young swift, plunging for the first time through the blue air.

"Garr-r! Up! Up! We fly! We fly!"

The deformed and withered body of Aunt Sidonia flew beside her on a broomstick, her thin hair streaming in the blast.

"To the north! To the north!" yelled the hag, managing her broomstick like a horse.

Cassandra burst into peals of laughter, remembering poor Messer Leonardo and his cumbrous mechanism.

Now she ascended, and the black clouds rolled together beneath her; now they burned blue in the flashes of jagged lightning. But above the clouds the sky was clear. A full moon shone, huge and round as a millstone, and so near she could touch it with her hand. Affrighted, she guided the goat downwards again, and he plunged with her headlong into the void.

"Devil of a wench, you 'll break your neck!" screamed Sidonia.

Now they were skimming so close to the ground that they brushed the rustling meadow-grasses; will-o'-the-wisps guided their course past old tree-trunks gleaming with rottenness; while the owl, the bittern, and the goatsucker mourned plaintively among the reeds.

Presently they flew across the summits of the Alps, their icy spars glittering in the moonshine; and again they dropped to the surface of the sea. Cassandra, scooping water in her hand, tossed it in the air, and rejoiced in the sapphire splashes.

Momently their pace increased, and they came up

with and distanced fellow-travellers: a sorcerer with long grey hair, in a tub; an ecclesiastic on a muck-rake, red, gorbellied, jovial as Silenus himself; a golden-haired, blue-eyed lass on a broom; a young and red-haired vampire on a grunting porker, and a hundred others.

"Whence come you, little sister?" cried Sidonia, and twenty voices answered her.

"From Candia! From the Isles of Greece! From Valenza! From the Brocken! From Mirandola, Benevento, from the caves and the fjords!"

"Whither go ye?"

"To Biterne! To Biterne! For the marriage of the great goat, the Buck of Biterne. Fly! Fly! Haste to the supper." And they passed over the dreary plain like a cloud of rooks on a whirlwind. The moon shone purple, and against it in the distance gleamed the cross upon a village church. The vampire hurled herself against it, tore away the cross and the great bell, casting them far off into the swamp, where they sank with a despairing clang. The vampire barked like a joyous dog, and the flaxen-headed lass on the cantering broomstick clapped her little hands with glee.

VIII

The moon was now hidden by the clouds. Torches flared with flames of green and blue, and upon

the chalky plateau the black shadows of the dancing witches spread and wheeled and interlaced and disentwined.

"Garr-r! Garr-r! 'T is the Sabbath! 'T is the Sabbath! From right to left! From right to left!"

They flew and they danced in their endless thousands like the withered and perishing autumn leaves. In their midst sat Hircus Nocturnus, the great he-goat, enthroned upon the mountain.

"Garr-r! Garr-r-r! Praise to the great Becco Notturno! The Buck of Biterne! The Buck of Biterne! Our wars are ended! Rejoice ye and rejoice!"

There was a screeching of pipes made of dead men's bones; the drum, stretched with the skin of the hanged, was beaten with the tail of a wolf. A loathsome stew was boiling in a vast cauldron, not seasoned with salt, for salt is abhorrent to the lord of that place.

Black were-cats were there dancing, lustful and emerald-eyed; slender maidens white as lilies; a shapeless capering incubus, grey as a spider; shuddering nuns; on a low bank, a white-bodied, plump, gigantic witch, with a stupid and good-natured face, was suckling two newly-hatched demons, already greedy and malicious. Three-year-old children, not yet admitted to the revelry, were feeding herds of toads, dressed as cardinals, with the sacred Host in their claws.

Sidonia and Cassandra joined the dance which

sucked them in and whirled them away like a howling storm.

"Garr-r-r! From right to left! From right to left!"

Long wet whiskers like those of a walrus swept Cassandra's neck; a thin winding tail tickled her face; she was impudently pinched and bitten; hateful endearments were whispered in her ears. She made no resistance; the wilder the merrier; the more shameless the more intoxicating.

Suddenly petrifaction fell on the assembly; all voices were hushed, all movement was arrested. From the black throne, surrounded by terror, where sat the great Unknown, came a dull hoarse roar, like the growl of an earthquake.

"Receive you my gifts! To the weak, my strength; my pride to the humble; to the poor-spirited, my wisdom; to the afflicted, my joy. Receive my gifts!"

Then an old man of venerable aspect, his grey beard flowing—one of the fathers of the Holy Inquisition, at the same time patriarch of the sorcerers, and celebrant of the Black Mass, chanted in solemn tones:

"*Sanctificetur nomen tuum per universum mundum et libera nos ab omni malo!* Be in awe, ye faithful ones, and fall prostrate!"

They knelt, falling on their knees with a crash, and as from one voice resounded the Sorcerer's Confession:

"*Credo in Deum patrem Luciferum, qui creavit*

cœlum et terram. Et in filium suum Beelzebub."

When the last sounds had died away, and there was renewed stillness, the same voice of the Unknown, deafening as an earthquake, cried:

"Bring hither my bride—my stainless dove!"

And the old man with the flowing beard inquired:

"What is the name of thy bride, thy stainless dove?"

"Madonna Cassandra! Madonna Cassandra!" roared the great voice.

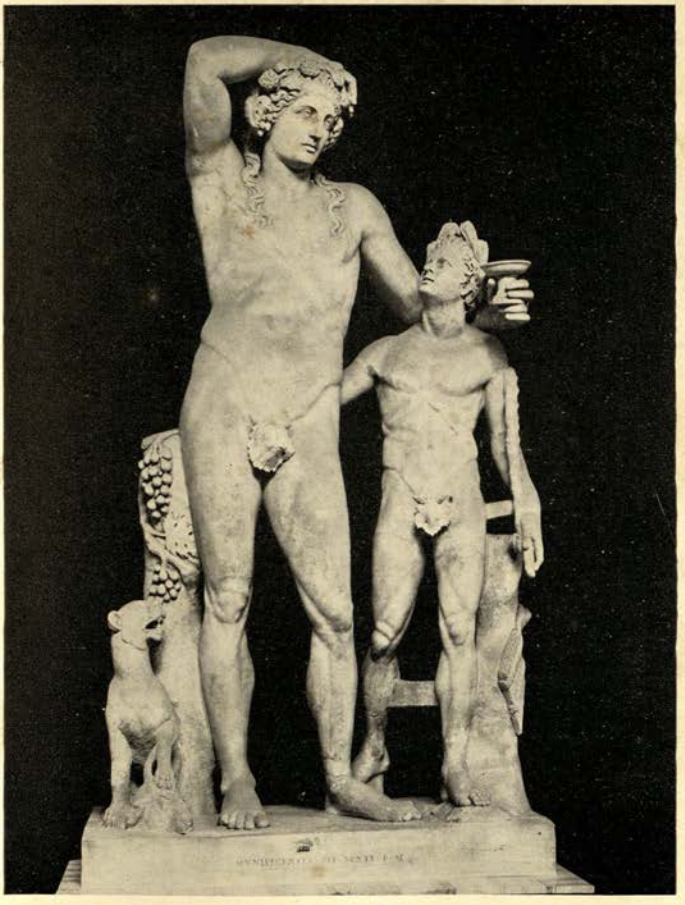
Hearing the pronouncement of her name, the girl's blood froze in her veins. Her hair stood erect.

"Madonna Cassandra! Cassandra!" rang the cry from the crowd. "Where hideth she?" Where is our sovereign? *Ave Arcisponsa Cassandra!*"

She hid her face and would have fled; but bony fingers, claws, antennæ, and probosces, and the hairy legs of spiders seized her; and dragged her trembling before the throne. The rank odour of a goat, and a chill as of death smote her; she closed her eyes in dread. Then he upon the throne cried: "Come!"

Her head hanging, she saw at her feet a fiery cross gleaming through the darkness. She made a supreme effort, took a step forward, and raised her eyes.

Then a miracle took place.



Dionysus the Olympian, Vatican, Rome.

Photo by Alinari.

The goat's skin fell from him as the scales from a sloughing snake; she was face to face with Dionysus the Olympian; thyrsus and vine-branch in his hands, a smile of eternal joy upon his lips, the panther at his feet pawing at the grapes.

And the *Sabbato diabolico* changed into the divine orgies of Bacchus; the witches became Mænads, the monstrous demons were kindly goat-footed Satyrs; the chalk rocks were colonnades of shining marble, lighted by the sun, and between them in the distance was the purple sea. The radiant gods of Hellas, surrounded by an aureole of fire, were gathering in the clouds, and the Satyrs and the Bacchantes, beating their timbrels, cutting their breasts with knives, squeezing the grape-juice into goblets of gold, and mingling it with their blood, danced and circled and sang:

"Glory to Dionysus! Glory to Dionysus! The gods have risen! Glory to the eternal gods!"

And Bacchus, the ever young, opened his arms to Cassandra. His voice was like thunder, shaking earth and sky as he cried:

"Come hither, my bride, my stainless dove!"

And she sank into the god's embrace.

IX

From the distance sang the morning cry of the cock, and a sharp odour of fog and smoke greeted the nostrils. Slowly through the air came the

sound of a bell, and at this sound the mountain was convulsed. Again the Mænads became the monstrous hags, the Satyrs or Fauns were demons, and the beautiful Dionysus resolved once more into the hideous and fetid Hircus Nocturnus.

"Homewards! Fly! Escape!"

"They have stolen my muck-rake!" the gor-bellied ecclesiastic roared despairingly.

"Hog, return to me!" screamed the red-haired vampire, shivering and coughing in the mountain damp.

The setting moon once more shone out from behind the clouds, and in the pallid crimson of her light, the frightened witches, swarm after swarm, like unclean flies, streamed away from the mountain.

"Garr-r! Garr-r! Up from the depths! Do not knock your heads! Save yourselves! Fly!"

The Becco Notturno, bleating lamentably, sank through the earth, leaving the rotten and stifling odour of sulphur. And slow and solemn the church bells sounded more triumphantly through the purer air.

X

Cassandra returned to herself in the darkened chamber of the little house by the Porta Vercellina. She was nauseated as if after drunkenness. Her head was like lead; her body broken with weariness.

The bell of St. Radegonda was tolling heavily

and monotonously. Outside some one was knocking insistently: some one who had already knocked more than once.

Cassandra listened, and recognised the voice of her suitor, the horsedealer from Abbiategrasso.

"For the Lord's love, open, Monna Sidonia! Monna Cassandra! Nay, then, are ye all gone deaf? I am wet through; would ye have me turn back through this fury of the elements?"

The girl dragged herself to her feet, crept to the shutters, and pulled out the rags with which her aunt had wedged them close. The dull light of a wet day streamed into the room, and fell on the naked crone, still sleeping a deathly sleep on the floor beside the trough, still stained with the unguent, and snoring profoundly.

Cassandra peeped out. The weather was detestable; the rain descending in torrents. Through the network of drops she could see the impatient lover, beside him his little ass, her head dolorously drooping as she leaned against the shafts of the cart, in which a calf, its feet tied together, mooed plaintively, stretching forth its muzzle.

The horsedealer getting no answer knocked louder than ever, and Cassandra waited to see what would happen. At last one of the laboratory windows opened, and the old alchemist looked out, his face sullen, as it generally was in the early morning.

"What 's all this noise?" he cried; "have you gone out of your five wits, you old devil? Go

to hell with you! Can't you see we 're all asleep? Take yourself off!"

"Why insult me thus, Messer Galeotto? I have come on an affair of importance. I bring a present for your exquisite niece—a sucking calf——"

"Go to the devil, blockhead," cried Galeotto, "you and your calf!"

And the shutter was slammed to. The horse-dealer stood for a moment dumbfounded; then, recovering himself, he knocked again, violently, as if he would smash the door with his fists.

The donkey's head drooped still lower, the rain pouring in streams off her long ears.

"God! how dull it all is!" murmured Cassandra, closing her eyes. And she thought of the frenzy of the Sabbath, the transformation of the Becco Notturno into Dionysus, the resurrection of the old gods, and she asked herself:

"Was it reality or dream? In good sooth, 't was a dream, and this is the reality! After Sunday always there is—just Monday!"

"Open! open!" yelled the horsedealer, hoarse and desperate. And the rain-drops plashed monotonously in the miry pools, the calf bleated piteously, and the bell of the neighbouring convent tolled on, with even and melancholy strokes.

BOOK V

THY WILL BE DONE—1494

"O mirabile giustizia di te, Primo Motore! tu non hai voluto mancare a nessuna potenzia l'ordine e qualità de suoi necessari effetti! O Stupenda Necessità!"—LEONARDO DA VINCI.

(O admirable justice of Thee, Prime Mover! To no force hast Thou permitted lack of the order and quality of its necessary effects! O Thrice-Marvellous Necessity!)

"Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."—PATERNOSTER.

I

CORBOLO the shoemaker, a citizen of Milan, having returned home one night over-merry, received from his wife, as he said, "more blows than would have driven a tired ass from Milan to Rome." The next morning, when his spouse had gone to her neighbour's to fetch the black pudding, Corbolo rooted some concealed coins out of his pouch, left the shop to his apprentice, and went off for a drink, to recover himself.

His hands in the pockets of his threadbare breeches, he sauntered along the narrow street—so narrow that a horseman must needs prick the foot-passengers with his spurs—and sniffed the eternal smell of oil, rotten eggs, sour wine, and

mouldy cellars. Whistling a tune, he looked up at the narrow strip of blue sky between the roofs, and at the many-coloured rags and torn garments stretched across the lane on lines that they might be dried in the sun, and solaced himself with his favourite proverb (of which, however, he never took the advice), "*Mala femina, buona femina, vuol bastone.*"

To shorten his road he passed through the cathedral, which was still in process of construction. Here there was noise and bustle as in a market-place. From door to door, notwithstanding the fine of five *soldi* imposed upon intruders, there passed persons carrying wine, baskets, cases, trunks, trays, planks, beams, bundles, some even leading asses and mules. The priests were praying and chanting; lamps burned on the altars, and murmurs came from the Confessional; yet the boys played at leap-frog, the dogs barked and fought, and sturdy beggars jostled each other in the quest for alms. Corbolo stood for a space in the crowd, listening with sly amusement to a dispute between two monks, a Franciscan and a Dominican, on the comparative claims of St. Francis and St. Catherine to occupy the seat in heaven which had been left vacant by the fall of Lucifer.

Corbolo's eyes blinked as he came out of the cathedral gloom into the strong sunlight of the Piazza dell' Arrengo. This was the liveliest part of Milan, crowded with the booths of small vendors, and so over-filled with packing-cases and rubbish

that foot-passengers could hardly make their way. From time immemorial these booths had lumbered the square, and no laws or penalties could expel them.

"Salad of Valtellina! lemons! oranges! artichokes! asparagus!" cried the vegetable-seller.

The rag-wives babbled and cackled like brood-hens. A donkey, almost concealed under a mountain of grapes, oranges, cauliflowers, fennel, beetroot, tomatoes, and onions, brayed in lacerating tones:

"Hee–ho—Hee–ho!" While his driver lustily thumped his shrunken sides, and yelled forth his guttural:

"Arri—Arri!"

A long string of blind persons, with sticks and guides, chanted a doleful and tedious supplication. A street-dentist, his hat ornamented with a chaplet of teeth, was standing over a man whose head he held between his knees, and with the rapid movements of a juggler, was drawing his teeth with huge pincers. Children were spinning tops under the feet of the pedestrians, and teasing a Jew with offers of a pig's head; Farfanicchio, the leader of the scamps, had let a mouse loose among the market-women. It rushed up the ample petticoats of Barbacchia, the fruit-seller, who jumped up as if she had been scalded, cursing the ragamuffins, and shaking her garments regardless of propriety.

A porter, carrying a pig's carcase, turned round

suddenly to see the fun, and terrified the horse of Messer Gabbadeo, the surgeon; it reared and plunged, and overturned a whole pile of kitchen-ware in the booth beside it; saucepans, frying-pans, skimmers, graters, rolled over with a deafening crash; the horse bolted and carried away the terrified surgeon, his arms round its neck, his great bass voice alternately imploring God and the Devil to rescue him. The dogs barked, curious faces were thrust from windows; laughter, cries, curses, whistling, shouting, rose on all sides; and the donkeys brayed from every side of the square.

Watching this diverting spectacle, the shoemaker said to himself philosophically:

"The world would be a good place enough, if it were not for the women, who devour their husbands as rust devours iron."

Then shading his eyes with his hand, he looked up at the vast unfinished pile surrounded with scaffolding. This was the great cathedral, the magnificent temple which Milan was erecting in honour of the Birth of the Virgin. All, small and great, had contributed to the shrine. The Queen of Cyprus had sent a precious cloth embroidered with gold. Caterina, the old rag-woman, had laid on the altar of the Virgin her only cloak, worth twenty *soldi*. Corbolo, who from his childhood had watched the progress of the building, saw this morning a new pinnacle, and rejoiced.

All around was heard the tapping of mallets and hammers. The immense blocks of sparkling

marble brought from the quarries on the Lago Maggiore were landed on the wharf at Laghetto de Santo Stefano, not far from the Ospedale Maggiore, and were still arriving at the building; cranes creaked and rattled their chains, iron saws grated on the marble, the workmen swarmed around the scaffolding like flies. And daily the great temple was growing, with its countless spires, its belfries and turrets of pure white gleaming against the azure heavens; a perpetual hymn raised by the people of Milan to the glory of Maria Nascente.

II

Corbolo descended by steep stairs from the piazza to a cool arched cellar set with wine casks, of which the master was a German named Tibaldo. The shoemaker greeted the company, and sitting down by his friend Scarabullo the tinman, ordered a flask of wine and hot pastry flavoured with thyme; then he drank a long slow draught, filled his mouth, and said:

"Scarabullo, if you desire wisdom, take unto yourself no wife."

"Why not?" demanded Scarabullo.

"Because, friend, to marry is to thrust your hand into a bag of serpents in order to draw out an eel. Better have the gout than a wedded wife, Scarabullo."

At the table beside them, surrounded by a hungry and credulous crowd, Mascarello, the jolly

goldsmith, was singing the praises of a fabulous land, where the vines are hung with sausages, and a goose and a gosling together cost a single penny; where there are mountains of cheese ready grated, and *gnocchi* and macaroni are cooked in the fat of capons and thrown to him who asketh; and *vernaccia*, the best white wine, into which enters not one drop of water, springs from the soil in a natural fountain. A little man named Gorgoglio, a glass-blower, at this moment came running into the tavern; by reason of the king's evil, his eyes were half-shut, like those of a new-born puppy. He was bibulous and a great lover of talk.

"Sirs, sirs!" he cried, raising his hat and wiping his streaming face, "I have seen the Frenchmen!"

"Gorgoglio, you dream. 'T is impossible they be here yet."

"I' faith, they be here; they are at Pavia. Let me but breathe! 'T is not weather for running, and I have run the whole course to be first with the news."

"Take my bottle. Drink and recount: of what sort be these French?"

"A bad sort, friends; a very bad sort. Heaven defend us from them! trust not your fingers in their mouths, friends. Choleric, savage infidels, like ferocious brutes; in a word, barbarians. They carry arquebuses eight *braccia* long, partisans of brass, iron bombards which belch stones; their horses are sea-monsters, shaggy, with docked ears and tails."

"Be they many?"

"Ay, a crowd; they beset the plain as locusts; you can see no end to them. The Lord hath sent them for the chastisement of our sins, this Black Death, these northern devils."

"But why, Gorgoglio, speak thus ill of them?" asked Mascarello; "they come as our friends—our allies."

"Allies! Hold your peace. Look after your pockets, say I, for that kind of ally is worse than an enemy. He 'll buy the horn and steal the bullock."

"Rave not, Gorgoglio. Expound simply why you hold these French inimical."

"Because they trample down our crops; because they fell our trees, carry off our beasts, ravish our women. Their king is a baboon; no soul behind his teeth; but he is a great lover of women. He carries a book, pictures of our handsomest women. And they say that, God helping them, they will not leave a maid between Milan and Naples."

"The villains!" cried Scarabullo, thumping with his fist so that the glasses rang.

"And our Moro," continued Gorgoglio, "dances on his hind legs to the sound of the French pipe. And they don't count us to be men, neither. 'You,' they say, making their grimaces, 'you are all thieves and assassins. You have poisoned your rightful duke, you have murdered an innocent boy. For this God punishes you and gives us your land.' And we, friends, are receiving them into our arms and feeding them!"

"These be old wives' tales, Gorgoglio."

"Blind me, cut out my tongue if I speak not the truth! Nor have I told all. Hearken, *signori miei*, to what they have the audacity to say. They say: 'We are destined to overcome all the peoples of Italy, to subdue all the seas and the nations of the sea, to destroy the grand Turk, and plant the true cross on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem; then we will come back to you, and we will execute on you the fury of God. And if you submit not yourselves, your name shall be wiped off from the face of the earth.' That 's what they say!"

"'T is ill news," sighed Mascarello the goldsmith. "Unheard-of news!"

The rest were silent.

Then Fra Timoteo, the lean Dominican, who had been disputing in the cathedral with Fra Cipollo about the saints in glory, raised his hands to heaven and said solemnly:

"Such were the words of Fra Girolamo Savonarola, that great prophet of the Lord. 'Behold,' said he, 'the man cometh who is destined to conquer Italy without drawing the sword from the scabbard. O Florence! O Rome! O Milan! Past is the hour of feasting and of song! Repent ye, repent! The blood of Gian Galeazzo, the blood of Abel which was spilt by Cain, crieth for vengeance before the throne of God.'"

III

At this moment a brace of soldiers came in.

"The French! the French! See!" exclaimed Gorgoglio, nudging his companions.

One of the newcomers was a Gascon: young, tall, and shapely, with a handsome impudent face adorned by red moustaches; a cavalry sergeant named Bonnivart. The other, old, fat, bull-necked, red-faced, swollen-eyed, ear-ringed, was a gunner from Picardy named Groguillioche. Both were a little drunk.

"*Sacrement de l'autel!*" said the sergeant, slapping the others on the back. "Shall we at last find a mug of good wine in this accursed town? The sour stuff of this Lombardy burns my throat like vinegar." And stretching himself on a bench, and throwing a contemptuous glance at the company, he rapped with his knuckles, and shouted in bad Italian:

"White wine, dry, your oldest: and brain sausage for the first course!"

"You are right, comrade," said Groguillioche; "when I think of our wine of Burgundy, of the precious *Beaune* gold as my Lison's hair, my heart bursts with melancholy. Most true is it: 'Like people, like wine.' Let us drink, comrade, to the prosperity of our France."

"Du grand Dieu soit mauldit à outrance
Qui mal vouldroit au royaume de France!"

"What say they?" murmured Scarabullo into Gorgoglio's ear.

"Scurvy talk!" said the latter. "They praise their own wine, and praise not ours."

"Just look at those two French cocks," grumbled the tinman; "my hand itches to be at them."

Meanwhile Tibaldo, the German host, with fat belly on thin legs, and a formidable bunch of keys at his leathern girdle, drew from the cask half *brentas* of wine, and served them to the foreigners in an earthenware jug, looking most suspiciously at his guests. Bonnivart drank his portion at one draught, and found it excellent: none the less, he spat, making a face of disgust. Just then Lotte, Tibaldo's daughter, passed by: a slim, flaxen-haired little lass, with kind blue eyes like her father's. The Gascon nudged his comrade, twirled his moustaches seductively, drank, and trolled out a song, to which Groguillioche added a husky chorus:

"Charles fera si grandes batailles
Qu'il conquerra les Itailles,
En Jerusalem entrera
Et mont Olivet montera."

Presently Lotte passed them again, modestly dropping her eyes, but the sergeant caught her by the waist and tried to pull her to his knee. She pushed him away, broke loose, and fled. He jumped up, caught her, and kissed her cheek, his lips still wet with wine. The girl screamed,

dropped the pitcher she was carrying, and struck the Frenchman so hard a blow that for a moment he was stunned, at which there was a general laugh.

"Well done, wench!" cried the goldsmith. "By St. Gervaso, I ne'er saw a heartier smack, nor one more seasonably applied."

Groguillioche tried to restrain his companion.

"Let her alone. Don't make a fool of yourself," he said.

But the Gascon was flown with wine, and, laughing with a laugh that was but at one side of his mouth, he cried:

"That 's your way, is it, my beauty? *Ventre-bleu!* next time it shall not be on your cheek, but fair on your lips."

Upsetting the table, he sprang after her, captured her, and would have executed his threat, had not the powerful hand of Scarabullo seized him by the throat.

"Ha! son of a dog! Hideous mug of a Frenchman! I 'll teach you how to insult the girls of Milan!" and he shook his victim backwards and forwards, nearly choking him.

"*Sacrebleu! Sacrebleu!*" roared Groguillioche, infuriated; "hands off, ruffian! *Vive la France! St. Denis et St. George!*" His sword was out, and prompt to be thrust into the tinman's back, but Mascarello, Gorgoglio, Maso, and the rest intervening, tied his hands. Now was utter confusion; tables overset, benches smashed, casks

rolling, shards of smashed pitchers under the feet, everywhere pools of wine. Seeing blood, naked swords, and brandished knives, Tibaldo rushed into the street, and, in a voice fit to fill the square, yelled:

"Assassination! Homicide! The French are sacking the town!"

At once the market bell rang forth and was answered by its brother of the Broletto. The dealers closed their shops. Fruit-sellers and rag-wives ran hither and thither packing their goods.

"San Gervaso and San Protaso! our protecting saints; lend us aid!" cried the fat vegetable-woman with the tremendous voice.

"What is on foot? What is happening? Is it a conflagration?"

"Down! Down with the Frenchmen!"

Farfanicchio, the naughty boy, danced with delight, whistling and yelling.

"Down with the Frenchmen! Down with the Frenchmen!"

Guards and soldiers now appeared on the scene, mighty with arquebuses and pikes. They were just in time to rescue Groguillioche and Bonnivart from death at the hands of the mob. Laying hands right and left, they arrested amongst others Corbolo the shoemaker.

His wife, who had run up on sound of the tumult, now wrung her hands piteously, and wailed:

"For pity's sake, let him go! Have mercy on

Pinnacles of the Cathedral of Milan.

Photo by Brogi.

my poor little husband! I will chastise him at home, and never allow him into a street squabble again. Believe me, Messeri, he is a perfect natural, and not worth the rope you would hang him with."

But Corbolo, hanging his head, fixing his eyes on the ground, and pretending not to hear these intercessions, hid behind the stout person of one of the guards, who seemed to him far less terrible than his spouse.

IV

Right above the scaffolding of the unfinished cathedral, up a narrow stair of rope to one of the slender pinnacles, not far from the principal tower, a certain young mason clomb, bearing a small statue of St. Catherine, to be fixed on the very top of the little spire. Around him rose a perfect forest of pinnacles, sharp-pointed like stalactites; spires, flying arches, stone lacework of unexampled flowers and foliage, prophets, martyrs, and angels, the grinning masks of devils, monstrous birds, sirens, harpies, dragons with scaly wings and gaping mouths, every sort of gargoyle at the terminals of the water-pipes. All was of marble very pure and white, upon which the shadows showed blue as smoke, the whole suggesting a winter wood clothed in sparkling frost. It was quiet, save that the swallows and swifts made joyous cries as they continually

circled above and around the building. The hum of the crowd in the square reached the young mason like the low murmur of an ant-hill. At times he fancied organ-notes and prayerful sighs rose from the interior of the temple as from the depth of its stony heart; and then it seemed as if the whole vast edifice breathed and grew and heaved to the sky like the eternal praise of the Birth of Mary; like the glad hymn of all ages and of all peoples to the Immaculate Virgin.

Suddenly the hum from the square increased in volume, and an uproar became plain to the ear. The mason paused in his work and looked down. Then his head swam and his eyes grew dim. He felt the edifice rocking under him, and the slender pinnacle towards which he was climbing bent like a reed.

"It is all over!" he said. "I am falling. Lord, receive my spirit."

He clung desperately to the rope, closed his eyes, and murmured:

"*Ave Maria, piena di grazia.*"

Then he felt more at ease. From above swept a breath of cool wind; he recovered himself, collected his strength, and climbed higher, listening no longer to the humming of earth, but ascending towards the serene and quiet heaven, saying with great unction:

"*Ave, dolce Maria, di grazia piena.*"

At this moment, traversing the broad marble roof, came the members of the building committee,

Council of the Fabric, architects both native and foreign, summoned by the Duke to consult about the Tiburio, the principal tower, which was to rise even higher than the cupola. Among them was Leonardo da Vinci; he had submitted his plan, but the council had rejected it as too daring, too extravagant, and not sufficiently in accord with the traditions of church architecture. The council quarrelled over the matter, and could not arrive at an agreement. Some said the building had been commenced by ignorant people, and that the inner columns were not stable enough to carry the Tiburio and all the lesser towers and pinnacles. According to others the cathedral was like to stand firm till Doomsday.

Leonardo took no part in the dispute, but stood aside, silent and alone. One of the workmen approached and handed him a letter.

"Messere," he said, "it has been brought to Your Magnificence by a messenger from Pavia."

Leonardo read the letter:

"Leonardo, I need thee. Come to me at once. October 14. GIAN GALEAZZO, the Duke."

The Master excused himself to his fellow-councillors, descended to the square, mounted, and rode off to the Castle of Pavia, a few hours' distant from Milan.

V

In the great park the chestnuts, elms, and maples

glowed golden and purple under an autumn sun. Slowly, like dead butterflies, the leaves dropped from the branches. There was no bubbling of water in the grass-grown fountains. Asters were withering in neglected flower-beds.

Approaching the castle Leonardo saw a dwarf; it was Gian Galeazzo's old jester, the only servant who had remained faithful to the dying Duke. Recognising the painter, he advanced running and leaping.

"How is His Highness?" asked Leonardo.

The dwarf made no reply, only waved his hands with a gesture of despair; Leonardo directed his horse to the principal entrance, but the other stopped him.

"Nay, not by this road," said he, "it hath too many eyes. His Highness prays you to come secretly, for Madonna Isabella would forbid your entry did she know of it. Come by this path."

They entered by a corner tower, then mounted a stair and traversed apartments once magnificent but now gloomy and deserted. The gilded Cordovan leather had been torn from the walls; the throne and its silken canopy were hung with cobwebs; autumn winds had blown yellow leaves through the broken window panes.

"Thieves! ruffians!" muttered the dwarf, pointing out to his companion these marks of desolation. "Believe me, Messere, eyes cannot bear to look on the things done here. I would have fled to the uttermost ends of the earth were it not that my

lord hath no one to look to but me, his ancient deformity. This way, I pray you, this way."

Opening a door he introduced Leonardo into a close, dark room, heavy with the odour of drugs.

VI

At that moment Gian Galeazzo was being bled: according to the rules of surgery, the operation was performed by candle-light, and with closed shutters. The surgeon, or rather the barber, a timid old man, was opening the vein, and his assistant held the brass basin; the physician, a man of grave and impenetrable countenance, wearing spectacles and a hood of dark purple velvet and squirrel's fur, merely watched, for to handle surgical instruments was derogatory to the dignity of a Doctor of Medicine.

"Before night he shall be bled again," said the great man when the arm had been bandaged and the Duke was restored to his pillows.

"*Domine magister*," objected the barber, respectfully, "were it not wiser to wait? The patient is weakened, and an excessive drain of blood——"

But he stopped short, for the doctor looked at him with freezing irony.

"'T is time you knew that of the twenty-four pounds of blood in the human body you may let twenty without damage. I have bled sucking babes and seen them recover."

Leonardo listened to this conversation, but reminded himself that to dispute with doctors was as vain as to argue with alchemists. He held his peace till the empirics had departed and the dwarf had covered the patient and shaken his pillows. Above the bed hung a little green parrot in a cage; cards and dice strewed the table. On it was also a glass with goldfish, at the Duke's feet slept a little white dog,—all the faithful servant's last attempts at ministering to his master's amusement.

"Has the letter been sent?" asked the sick man, not opening his eyes.

"Excellency, Messer Leonardo has come. We waited, fearing to disturb Your Grace's slumber."

A feeble smile illuminated the Duke's countenance. He tried to raise himself.

"Master, at last! And I had been fearing you would not come!"

Gian Galeazzo took the artist's hand in his, and a faint colour spread over his beautiful young face—he was but four-and-twenty. The dwarf left the room to keep guard at the door.

"Friend," began the Duke, "you have heard the slander?"

"Which slander, my lord?" asked the painter.

"If you know not which, 't is that you have heard nothing, and it is not worth the trouble of telling you. Yet no, I will tell you, that we may have our mock at it together. They say—" He paused, looked the artist full in the

Gian Galleazzo Sforza (Luini, Milan).

Photo by Anderson.

eyes, and, smiling calmly, completed the phrase: "they say 't is you have murdered me."

Leonardo thought him delirious, but he repeated:

"Just that. They say 't is you have murdered me. Three weeks ago Il Moro and his Beatrice sent me a basket of delectable peaches. But Madonna Isabella says that from the moment I tasted them I have pined away; that in your garden you have a peach-tree which bears poison."

"In very truth," assented Leonardo, "I have such a tree."

"*Amico mio!* can it be possible——"

"Nay; not if the fruit be really that from my garden. I can explain the reason of these rumours. To study the effect of poison upon trees, I inoculated my peach-tree with arsenic, and warned Zoroastro, my disciple, to beware of the fruit. Probably he was over-hasty in relating the fact, for as matter of truth, the experiment failed and the peaches have proved innocuous."

"I knew it! I knew it!" cried the Duke with relief. "No one is guilty of my death. Yet here each one is suspecting the other, and hating and fearing him! If it were but possible to speak openly, as you and I speak to each other at this instant! My uncle is suspected of the deed; but I know him to be a kindly man, though timorous and weak. What interest could he have in my death when I myself am willing to give him my throne? I want nothing; I would gladly have left all these

people and lived in retirement and liberty with a few chosen friends. I would have been a monk, or thy pupil, Leonardo. But no one will believe that I do not desire power. Why have they done this evil? *Dio mio!* they have not poisoned me, but they have poisoned themselves, poor blind ones! with the harmless fruit of thy harmless tree. I have grieved over perverse fate which makes me to die young, but now I am calm, I am at ease, Master, as though on a scorching day I had thrown off dusty clothes and cast myself into pure water. I know not how to tell thee, dear friend, but of a surety thou dost comprehend, thou who art thyself——"

Leonardo smiled serenely, and pressed the poor wasted hand, but did not answer.

"I knew that you would understand," continued the invalid, with animation. "Do you remember how once you said to me that the study of those eternal laws which govern the vicissitudes of nature conducts men to humility and to great tranquillity of soul? Your phrase struck me even then; but now in sickness, in loneliness—ay, in delirium—how often do I remember thy words, and thyself, and thy countenance, and thy voice, O Master! Sometimes it seems to me that by different ways thou and I have reached the same end: thou by the way of life—I by death."

At this moment the door opened, and the dwarf burst in to the room, and announced with agitation:

"Monna Druda!"

Leonardo would have retired, but the Duke detained him, and Gian Galeazzo's old nurse came in bearing a phial of scorpion ointment. It was a precious balsam, made by catching scorpions in the height of summer, when the sun is in Cancer, keeping them for fifty days exposed to the sun, then plunging them alive into hundred-year-old olive oil, mixed with groundsel, mithridates, and snake-root. Nightly the patient must be anointed at the temples, in the armpits, on the belly, round the heart; and then the wise woman swore he would take no ill from spells, from witchcraft, nor eke from poison.

The old nurse, seeing Leonardo seated on the bed, stopped, turned ashy-white, and came nigh dropping her priceless balm.

"*Santa Vergine benedetta!* Defend us!" she murmured. And crossing herself, and mumbling exorcisms and prayers, she ran as fast as her old legs would carry her, to bring Madonna Isabella the terrible tidings.

Monna Druda was entirely convinced that Ludovico the assassin, and Leonardo his accomplice, had brought Gian Galeazzo to his death, if not by poison, at any rate by witchcraft and the evil eye. The Duchess Isabella, kneeling in her private chapel before the most sacred image, was praying fervently, when Monna Druda, greatly agitated, rushed in to tell her Leonardo was with the Duke. The lady leaped to her feet, and cried, her face scarlet with indignation:

"It cannot be! Who has allowed him to pass?"

"Nay, Most Illustrious, who can tell how this accursed sorcerer should pass? Have I not been saying to Your Excellency—" She was interrupted by a page, who knelt before the lady.

"Most Excellent Madonna, will your ladyship and your ladyship's most illustrious consort deign to receive His Majesty the Most Christian King of France?"

VII

Charles VIII. was lodged in the lower floor of the Castle of Pavia, luxuriously prepared for him by Ludovico Il Moro. Reposing after his dinner, he was listening to the reading of a book, absurdly translated out of the Latin into French, and called *Mirabilia Urbis Romæ.*

Charles had been a solitary, sickly child, frightened to death by his father. During many weary years, in the Castle of Amboise, he had beguiled his melancholy by the reading of chivalric romances, till his brain, never of the strongest, was completely turned. At twenty years of age he was on the throne; and, his mind full of Lancelot, Tristram, and the other heroes of the Round Table, believed himself destined to rival these legendary persons, and to put into the reality of life what belonged only to books and to dreams. The Court poets bathed him in an atmosphere of perpetual adulation, calling him the offspring of

Mars, the heir of Julius Cæsar, when at the head of a great host he had crossed the Alps, and made his descent into Lombardy, lured by the extravagant hope of conquering Italy and the East, and destroying the heretical Mahometan religion.

To-night, listening to the description of the wonders of Rome, the King smiled, thinking of the glory to accrue to him from the Eternal City. His thoughts were, however, somewhat confused. He had dined heavily, and was now troubled by stomach-ache and headache, and above all by the recollection of a certain Madonna Lucrezia Crivelli, whose beauty had haunted him for a day and a night.

Charles VIII. was low in stature and sufficiently ugly. His chest was narrow, his shoulders crooked, his legs thin as a pair of tongs. His nose was too large, his mouth hung open, his projecting eyes were so short-sighted as to give him a perpetually strained expression; his light hair was scanty, and he had no moustache; his hands and face twitched convulsively; his speech was thick and abrupt; it was said he had six toes, and for this reason had set the Court fashion of broad soft shoes of black velvet, rounded at the top to the form of a horse-shoe. This general ungainliness, together with his habitual melancholy and distraction, produced an impression, not too ill warranted, of natural imbecility.

"Thibaut! Thibaut!" he cried suddenly to his valet, interrupting the reading with his customary

abruptness, and stammering with the effort to find his words. "Thibaut! I—somehow think I am thirsty. Eh? Perhaps the heat—Bring me some wine—Thibaut——"

The Cardinal Brissonet, entering, announced that the Duke was expecting His Most Christian Majesty.

"Eh—eh? What? The Duke? Good; we come immediately. Let me first drink——"

And he stretched his hand for the cup brought by his servant. Brissonet, however, stopped him, and demanded of Thibaut:

"Is it of our own?"

"No, Monsignore; from the ducal cellar. Our own is consumed."

Brissonet upset the cup.

"Your Majesty will pardon me, but the wines of this place may be unwholesome. Thibaut, send a messenger at once to the camp, and let him fetch a barrel from the field cellar."

"Why—eh? What is this?" asked the King, disconcerted.

The Cardinal whispered that he feared poison; anything might be expected from men who had done to death their legitimate sovereign; true, nothing suspicious had yet occurred, but prudence never comes amiss.

"Eh? All child's folly!" grumbled Charles, twitching one shoulder; however, he submitted.

The heralds took their places before the King; pages raised over his head the splendid baldachin

Charles VIII. (National Museum, Florence).

Photo by Alinari.

of blue silk, embroidered with the silver lilies of France; the seneschal threw on his shoulders a scarlet mantle, ermine-bordered and embroidered with golden bees, and the motto, "*Roi des abeilles n'a pas d'aiguillons*"; the procession traversed gloomy and deserted halls, and took its way to the apartments of the dying man.

Passing the chapel, the King caught sight of the Duchess Isabella at her faldstool. He gallantly removed his cap, stopped, and calling her "dear sister," would have kissed her on the lips, according to the French ceremonial, but the Duchess hurried to throw herself at his feet.

"Have compassion on us, most clement lord," she began hurriedly, in set words. "Defend the innocent, O magnanimous knight-errant, and God shall give thee thy reward! Il Moro has robbed us of everything; he has usurped our throne; has given poison to Gian Galeazzo, my husband, legitimate inheritor of the Lords of Milan! In our own house he has surrounded us with spies and assassins. . . ."

Charles scarcely understood or even listened.

"Eh? Eh? What?" he asked, stammering and twitching. "No, no, sister. No occasion. . . . Rise, rise, I beseech you."

But the unhappy lady knelt on, embracing his knees, weeping, and covering his hands with kisses.

"Ah, Sire, if you also fail me, what remains to me but to take my life?"

This completed the King's embarrassment; puckering his face like a child about to cry, he stuttered:

"There, there! Good God! 't is impossible! Brissonet! Brissonet!—I can't. You tell her that——"

Before this lady, who in her humility and her desperation appeared to him sublime as some heroine of antique tragedy, he felt no sentiment of compassion, but only an inane desire to make his escape.

"Most noble lady, calm yourself," said the Cardinal, coldly courteous. "His Majesty will do all that is in his power for you and for your consort, Messer Jean Galeas." (So he Gallicised the name.)

The Duchess looked at the Cardinal; then looked at the King; and as if realising for the first time the sort of being to whom she was making supplication, became silent.

Deformed, pitiful, ridiculous, he stood before her, his mouth gaping, a foolish smile over his whole countenance, his light eyes opened in a senseless stare.

"I, the granddaughter of Ferdinand of Aragon, at the feet of this abortion!—this idiot!"

She rose, and a flush mounted on her pale cheek.

The King felt it incumbent on him to say something, to end somehow this embarrassing silence. He made a great effort, shrugged his shoulders, blinked, but could get no farther than

his usual, "Eh? Eh? What?" Then he waved his hand in despair, and relapsed into dumbness. Isabella measured him with her eyes in undissembled scorn, and Charles was abashed and hung his head.

"Brissonet! Brissonet! Let us go! Eh? What?"

The pages threw open the doors, and his progress continued till he had reached the room where Gian Galeazzo lay dying. Here the shutters had been thrown back, and the calm light of the autumn evening fell across the gilded tree-tops and streamed in through the windows.

The King approached the sufferer, and inquired solicitously after his health, calling him "*cousin*," "*mon cousin.*" Gian Galeazzo answered with such a gentle smile that the poor King was relieved, and gradually recovered from his confusion.

"May the Lord send victory to the host of Your Highness," said the Duke. "And when you shall be at Jerusalem, at the Holy Sepulchre of Christ, oh, then, pray for the health of my poor soul; for by that time, Sire, I——"

"Oh, no! no, brother! Speak not thus," protested Charles; "you shall recover. We must march together against these unclean Turks. Eh? Believe my words. I give you my word—Eh? What?"

Gian Galeazzo shook his head.

"Impossible," he murmured, looking into the King's eyes with his penetrating glance. "And, Sire, when I shall be dead, I pray you, abandon not

my little Francesco and my unhappy Isabella. They will have none other to look to."

"Good God! Good God!" murmured Charles, overcome by unlooked-for emotion. His lips quivered, their corners drooped, and, as by a sudden light from within, his face shone with an immense kindliness. He bent over the sick man and folded him in his arms.

"Brother! my poor dear brother!" They smiled sadly, like a pair of poor sick children, and kissed each other.

When he had left the room, the King turned to the Cardinal.

"Brissonet—Brissonet! We must do something —eh? Defend—protect— This will not do! It cannot be permitted. I am a knight; I must succour the unfortunate. Do you understand?"

"Sire," replied the Cardinal, "what is the use? His destiny is to die. We cannot profit him, but we can damn ourselves. Moreover, 't is Il Moro who is your ally."

"Il Moro is a murderer! that is it; a proper murderer," exclaimed Charles, his eyes sparkling with indignation.

"Is it our business?" asked Brissonet, shrugging his shoulders, with a smile. "Il Moro is neither better nor worse than others. 'T is political necessity. We are but men, Sire."

The cupbearer now came with a goblet of French wine, which Charles drank thirstily. It refreshed him, and scattered his sad thoughts.

With the cupbearer had entered a messenger from Ludovico, bearing an invitation to supper for the King. Charles declined it; the envoy pressed his suit, but unavailingly. Then the messenger whispered to Thibaut, who in turn whispered to the King.

"Your Highness—Madonna Lucrezia——"

"Eh? What? What Lucrezia?"

"The lady with whom Your Majesty danced last night."

"Ah, yes; to be sure. I recall her. Madonna Lucrezia; a pretty little mouthful! Do you hint she would be at supper?"

"Certes, she will be there. And she supplicates Your Highness——"

"She supplicates? Eh? What say you, Thibaut? I, forsooth— Well, well, to-morrow we take the field—'t is the last time. Messere, give your master my thanks, and tell him that I—forsooth——"

The King took Thibaut aside.

"Hark you—this Madonna Lucrezia—who is she?"

"Sire, the leman of Il Moro."

"Alas!"

"A single word from Your Majesty and all can be accomplished this evening itself, if you will, Sire."

"No! no! How? I—his guest?"

"Il Moro will find his pleasure in it. Sire, you understand not this people here!"

"Well then, well! As you will. It is your affair."

"Your Majesty may be at ease. A single word——"

"Speak no more, Thibaut. It mislikes me. Have I not said 't is your work. I have nothing to say to it. Do what you choose!"

Thibaut bowed and withdrew.

Upon reaching the foot of the stair the King frowned and scratched his head, trying to recall his thoughts.

"Brissonet! Brissonet! What was I saying? Ah yes—to defend—offended innocence. I am sworn knight——"

"Your Majesty must quit these thoughts. They fit not with the present moment. Later, when we shall have returned victorious from Jerusalem——"

"Jerusalem!" echoed the King, and his eyes dilated, and on his lips came a pale, faint, dreamy smile.

"The hand of the Lord leads Your Majesty to victory," continued Brissonet; "the finger of God points the way to the army of the cross."

Charles raised his eyes to heaven as if inspired, and repeated, "Finger of God! Finger of God!"

VIII

The young Duke died eight days later. Before his death he prayed for an interview with Leonardo,

but Isabella refused to permit it, Monna Druda having told her that the bewitched have always an insuperable and fatal wish to see those who have enchanted them. The old woman indefatigably anointed the patient with scorpion ointment, the doctor ordered blood-letting, the barber opened veins. Nevertheless he quietly died.

"Thy will be done," were his last words.

Ludovico had his body taken from Pavia to Milan, and buried him under the shadow of the cathedral.

Nobles and elders of the city assembled at the castle, and Ludovico, after assuring them of the profound grief he suffered at the untimely death of his nephew, made proposal that the child Francesco, Gian Galeazzo's son, should be declared Duke. The assembly maintained it were madness to invest an infant with such power. Il Moro himself was implored, in the name of the people, to assume the sceptre. He feigned refusal, but reluctantly yielded to their prayers.

Gold brocade was brought, and the Duke put it on; he then rode to the basilica of Sant' Ambrogio surrounded by a crowd of courtiers—*Viva Il Moro! Viva Il Duca!*—amid the sounding of trumpets, the firing of cannon, the clashing of bells, and—the silence of the people.

A few days later the most sacred relic in Milan, one of the Nails of the True Cross, was solemnly transported to the cathedral. By this function Il Moro hoped to please the populace and to consolidate his power.

IX

That night a crowd assembled before Tibaldo's wine-cellar in the Piazza dell' Arrengo. There were present the tinman Scarabullo, Mascarello the goldsmith, Maso the furrier, Corbolo the shoemaker, and Gorgoglio the glass-blower. Standing on a cask in the middle of the crowd was Fra Timoteo, the Dominican, delivering a sermon:

"Brothers! when Santa Elena had found the life-giving Tree of the Cross and the other instruments of the Lord's Passion, which had been buried by the heathen in the earth under the shrine of Venus, then the Emperor Constantine, taking one of these most holy and awful Nails, bade the smiths work it into the bit of his war-horse, that thus the word of the prophet Zechariah might be fulfilled: 'In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses Holiness unto the Lord.' And this ineffable relic gave him the victory over his enemies and over the adversaries of the Roman Empire. . . ." Here Fra Timoteo made a pause, then raising his hands to heaven he cried in a lamentable voice: "And now, brethren beloved, a great abomination is being committed. Il Moro, the evil-doer, the homicide, the usurper, seduceth the people with impious festivals, and would use the most Holy Nail for the support of his trembling throne."

The crowd showed agitation, and low cries were heard.

"And know ye, my brethren, upon whom he hath devolved the construction of the machine for raising the Nail to its place in the cupola above the high altar?"

"To whom?"

"To Leonardo da Vinci, the Florentine."

"Who is this Leonardo?" asked several persons.

"Nay," returned others, "we know him; the poisoner of the young Duke!"

"Leonardo the sorcerer! Leonardo the heretic! the infidel!"

Corbolo timidly undertook the defence.

"Friends, I have heard say that Leonardo is a good man, who does ill to none, and is compassionate not only of men but of the meanest animals."

"Speak not foolishly, Corbolo!"

"Hold your tongue. How can a sorcerer be good?"

"My sons! my sons!" declaimed Fra Timoteo, "there shall be a day when men shall praise the great deceiver, him who walketh in darkness, saying of him, 'He is kind, he is just, he is good'; for his face shall be like unto the face of the Christ, and he shall have a voice comforting and pleasant like the voice of a singing woman. And many shall be led astray by his wily kindness. And by the four winds of heaven he shall call together tribes and nations, as a partridge with a deceiving cry calls into her nest the brood of another. Be watchful, O brethren! Behold the angel of darkness, the prince of this world, who is called

Antichrist, cometh in human shape. Be watchful, I say, because this Florentine, this Leonardo, is the precursor and the servant of Antichrist."

"'T is true!" cried Gorgoglio (who, however, had never before even heard of Leonardo); "they say he has sold his soul to the Devil, and has signed the covenant with his blood."

"Holy Mother of God, have mercy upon us!" babbled Barbaccia the fruit-woman. "Stamma, the wench at the hangman's who does charing at the prison, told me that this Leonardo (Heaven defend me from speaking his name after dusk) wrests the bodies from the gallows—cuts them up —takes out their bowels——"

"You know not what you speak," said Corbolo; "'t is a matter of science, and called Anatomy."

"They say he has made a contrivance to fly in the air on bird's wings," observed Mascarello the goldsmith.

"Veglias also, that old winged serpent, rebelled against God," commented Fra Timoteo; "Simon Magus also raised himself into the air for flight, but the holy Apostle Saint Paul threw him down."

"He walketh on the water," cried Scarabullo. "He says, 'God walked on the sea and so will I.' Heard you ever so great blasphemy?"

"He goes into a bell, and descends to the bottom of the deep," added Maso.

"Nay, brothers, credit not that!" cried Gorgoglio. "What need hath he of a bell? He

Columbine (Leonardo da Vinci, Windsor).

Photo by Mansell.

transforms himself into a fish and swims; he transforms himself into a bird and doth fly."

"*Ahi!* beloved brothers!" cried Timoteo; "and the Nail, the Holy Nail is in the hands of this Leonardo!"

"It shall not be!" shouted Scarabullo, clenching his fists; "death to us sooner than profanation of our holy things! We will tear the Nail from the hands of the infidel."

"Vengeance for the Holy Nail! Vengeance for our poisoned lord! Burn him! Hang him!"

"Brothers, what do ye?" cried the shoemaker with imploring hands; "the night patrol will pass in a moment, and the captain of justice——"

"To the devil with the captain of justice! Run if you 're frightened, Corbolo; run under your wife's petticoat."

And armed with cudgels, staves, poles, and stones, the crowd surged through the streets, shouting and cursing. In front went the monk, bearing the crucifix and chanting the psalm, "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered! As wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God!"

The torches smoked and flared. In their scarlet light the lonely moon grew pale, and the quiet stars trembled in the heavens.

X

Leonardo in his quiet workshop was occupied

with the machine for the elevation of the Holy Nail. Zoroastro was making a casket, all glass and gold, in which the relic was to be displayed. Giovanni Boltraffio was sitting in a dark corner watching the Master.

Gradually, however, Leonardo had forgotten his machine, his thoughts having wandered to theories as to the transmission of force by means of blocks and levers. He had made a complicated calculation in which the mathematical law (the inner principle of reason) had explained to him the mechanical law (the outer principle of nature); two great secrets were thus fused into one still greater secret.

"Man," thought he, "will never invent anything so perfect as doth Nature, which of necessity so disposeth her laws that every effect is straitly bound up with its cause."

In face of the infinite abyss into which he was directing his penetrating gaze, his soul was filled with that sense of overwhelming wonder which has no likeness to the other sentiments of men. On the margin of the paper, covered with the calculations for the simple machinery required for the elevation of the Holy Nail, he wrote these words which echoed in his heart like a prayer:

"*O mirabile giustizia di te, Primo Motore! tu non hai voluto mancare a nessuna potenzia l'ordine e qualità de suoi necessari effetti!*" (O admirable justice of Thee, Prime Mover! To no force hast

Thou permitted lack of the order and quality of its necessary effects!)

But the artist's meditations were interrupted by a furious knocking at the outer door, together with chanting of psalms, and the objurgations and yells of an inflamed rabble. Giovanni and Zoroastro were rushing to see what had happened, when Maturina the cook, with dishevelled hair, burst half dressed into the room, crying:

"Thieves! Robbers! Murderers! Holy Mother of God have mercy on us!"

"What is it?" asked Leonardo of Marco d'Oggionno, who had also entered, arquebus in hand, and was beginning to shut the shutters.

"I know not exactly. It would seem a crowd of housebreakers, egged on by monks."

"What is their demand?"

"Only their father can understand these sons of the devil! They demand the Holy Nail."

"I have it not. 'T is in the sacristy in the care of Monsignor Arcimboldi."

"'T is what I told them. But being mad as dogs in the time of the summer solstice, they hearkened not, but continued to vilify Your Worship as an infidel and a sorcerer, and the poisoner of Gian Galeazzo."

During this colloquy the noise in the street grew apace.

"Open, or we will fire this accursed nest. In one moment, Leonardo, you shall be flayed! Demon! Antichrist!"

"Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered!" chanted Fra Timoteo to the accompaniment of Farfanicchio's stridulous whistle.

Suddenly Jacopo, the wicked little servant, ran in, sprang on the window ledge, opened the shutter, and was going to jump into the court-yard, but Leonardo held him back.

"Whither art going, child?"

"To call the guard. The captain of justice passes at this hour."

"No, no. If they catch you they will kill you without a word spoken."

"They shall not see me. I will get over the wall, through Aunt Trulla's garden, over the green ditch into the backyard. 'T is as good as done! Likewise it were better they killed me than you, Master."

And glancing back with eyes full of love and daring, the lad leaped from the window, and was off like a flash.

"For once the little devil is some use," said Maturina shaking her head.

A stone came crashing through the window, and shrieking and wringing her hands, the fat woman fled, felt her way down the dark stairs to the cellar, and hid in a wine-cask. Marco hurried upstairs to bar the windows; Giovanni, pale, distressed, but indifferent to the peril, turned a woeful countenance to Leonardo, and fell at his feet.

"O Master, they say—I swear it is not true—nay, I believe it not—but for God's sake tell me

yourself—!" and he stopped short, panting with agitation. Leonardo smiled sadly.

"You fear they speak truth that I am a murderer?"

"A word, Master! a single word from your own lips!"

"But why, friend? If you can harbour a doubt, you would not believe me."

"Oh, Messer Leonardo, I am in torture—A word, a single word!"

Leonardo did not answer immediately; then he said in a shaking voice:

"You also, Giovanni, with them! You, also, against me!"

Outside the blows were such that the whole house shook. Scarabullo was forcing the door with an axe. Leonardo, hearing the imprecations and the insults of the infuriated crowd, felt his heart contracted with anguish and great solitude. His chin drooped, and his glance fell on the lines just written: "*O mirabile giustizia di te, Primo Motore!*"

He smiled, and with great humility repeated the words of the dying Gian Galeazzo:

"All is well. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

BOOK VI

THE DIARY OF GIOVANNI BOLTRAFFIO— 1494–1495

L'amore di qualunque cosa è figliuolo d'essa cognitione. L'amore à tanto piu fervente, quanto la cognitione è piu certa.

LEONARDO DA VINCI.

(Knowledge of a thing engenders love of it; the more exact the knowledge, the more fervent the love.)

"Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves."—ST. MATT. X., 16.

GIOVANNI'S DIARY

ON the 25th of March, 1494, I entered myself as a disciple in the studio of Messer Leonardo da Vinci, the Florentine Master.

*

This is the order of his teaching: perspective; the dimensions and proportions of the human body; drawings from examples by the best masters; drawings from nature.

*

To-day Marco d'Oggionno, my fellow-disciple, has given me a book, taken down entirely from the words of our Master. The book begins thus:

"The purest joy is given to the body by the light

of the sun; to the spirit, by the clear shining of mathematics. That is why the science of Perspective (in which the contemplation of the bright line —*la linia radiosa*—true solace of the eye, goes hand in hand with the clearness of mathematics—true solace of the mind) must be exalted above all other human research and science. May He who said, 'I am the true Light,' lend me His aid that I may know the science of Perspective—the science of His light. I divide this book into three parts: the first, the diminishing, by distance, of the *size of objects;* the second, the diminishing of the *distinctness of the colour;* the third, the diminishing of the *clearness of the outline.*"

*

The Master cares for me like a father. When he learned of my poverty, he refused to take the monthly payment agreed on.

*

The Master says:

"When you shall have grasped well your Perspective, and hold in your mind the proportions of the human body, then in your walks abroad notice assiduously the postures and movements of men, how they stand, walk, talk, and quarrel; how they laugh and fight; the manner of their faces when they are doing these things, and the manner of the faces of the bystanders who want to separate the fighters; and the faces of those who look on with apathy. Set all in pencil in a note-book of

coloured paper, which you should always have about you. When the booklet is filled, take another; put the first one away and keep it. In no wise destroy nor rub out these sketches; for the movements of the body are so endless that no memory could hold them all. That is why you must look on these rough sketches as your best teachers."

I have made myself such a sketch-book.

*

To-day in the Vicolo dei Pattari, not far from the cathedral, I encountered my uncle, Oswald Ingrim. He told me he renounced me; and accused me of ruining my soul in the house of the heretic and the infidel.

*

Whenever I am heavy of heart, I have but to look on his face to grow light and gay. How wondrous are his eyes: clear, blue, pale, and cold—cold as ice. The voice, most pleasant and soft. The most cruel, the most obdurate, can by no means resist his persuasiveness. He sits at his work-table, immersed in thoughts, parting and smoothing his golden beard, long and soft as the silk of a maiden. When he talks with any one, then he partly closes one eye with a merry and kind expression; his glance from under the thick and overhanging eyebrows penetrates the very soul.

*

He dislikes lively colours, and new and dis-

commoding fashions; nor does he affect perfumes. His linen is of Rhenish stuff, marvellous clean and fine. His black velvet *berretta* carries no plumes nor ornaments. His suiting is of black; but he wears a mantle of dark red which reaches to the knee, and hangs in straight folds, as was the old mode in Florence. His movements are easy and quiet, but notable. He is like no one else.

*

Shoots excellently with the bow or arbalist, rides, swims, is a master of fence with the small sword. To-day I saw him hit the highest point of the cupola of a church with a small thrown coin. Messer Leonardo, by the skill and the strength of his hand, surpassed every competitor.

He is left-handed; but with that same left hand, for all it looks delicate and soft as a woman's, he bends iron fetters and twists the tongue of a brazen bell.

*

While I was watching him, the child Jacopo ran in laughing and clapping his hands.

"Cripples, Messer Leonardo, monsters! Come your ways into the kitchen. I have brought you such beauties that you shall lick your fingers for joy!"

"Whence came they?"

"From the porch of Sant' Ambrogio. Beggars from Bergamo! I promised you 'd give them supper if they 'd let themselves be painted."

Leaving the picture of the Virgin unfinished,

Leonardo betook him to the kitchen, I following. We found two brothers, very old and swollen with dropsy, great hanging *goîtres* on their throats. With them was the wife of one of them, a withered little old body, whose name Ragnina (Little Spider) seemed very suitable.

"You see," cried Jacopo triumphantly, "I said you would be pleased! Don't I know exactly what you like?"

Leonardo sat down by the hobgoblin cripples, ordered wine to be brought, served it to them himself, questioned them kindly, told them absurd stories to make them laugh. At first they were restive and suspicious, not understanding why they had been brought in. But when he related an anecdote about a dead Jew, whom his compatriots, to evade the law forbidding the burial of Hebrews within the confines of Bologna, had cut in pieces, pickled, spiced, and sent to Venice where he was eaten by a Florentine Christian, the Little Spider was like to burst with laughter. Soon all three were tipsy, and laughing and talking and making the most horrible faces. I was disgusted and looked away; but Leonardo watched them with deep and eager curiosity; and when their hideousness had reached its height, took out his sketch-book and drew with the same delighted attention that he had lavished on the smile of the Virgin.

In the evening he showed me a whole collection of caricatures; grotesques not only of men but

also of beasts—terrible shapes, like those which haunt sick men in their delirium, the human and the bestial compounded to make one shudder. The muzzle of a porcupine, its quills bristling, its under lip pendent, loose, and thin as a rag, displaying in a human grin two long white teeth like almonds; an old woman, her nose spread and hairy, and scarce bigger than a mole, her lips monstrously thick, like those squat and viscid fungi which grow out of withered trunks.

*

Cesare da Sesto tells me that sometimes the Master, having met some monstrosity in the street, will follow it for a whole day. Great deformity, he says, is as rare as great beauty; only mediocrity is negligible.

*

Marco d'Oggionno works like an ox, and carries out all the teacher's rules; the more he tries the less is his success. He is endowed with an invincible constancy. He thinks patience and labour shall possess all things; nor doth he despair of some day becoming a great painter.

He takes also, more than any of us, rare delight in the Master's inventions. One of these days he carried his note-book to the Piazza del Broletto, and according to the Master's system he made the required indexed notes of those faces which struck him chiefly in the crowd. But on reaching home he could in no wise translate his notes into a

living face. Likewise did he fail in the use of Leonardo's spoon for measuring out colour. His shadows remain thick and unnatural, just as his faces are wooden and devoid of all charm. Marco accounts for this by some small failure in his obedience to the rules. Cesare da Sesto ridicules him.

"This most excellent Marco," he says, "is a martyr in the cause of science. His example shows that all these measures and rules be worth nothing. To know how infants are born does not suffice to beget one. Leonardo deceiveth himself and others; he teaches one thing and performs another. When he paints he follows no rule save that of inspiration; yet he is not content to be a great artist, but would be a man of science also. I fear lest, coursing two hares, he run down neither."

It may be that in this mockery of Cesare's there is a modicum of truth; but no love for the Master. Leonardo hearkens to him, praises his intelligence, and never is wroth with him.

*

I am watching how he works at his *Cenacolo*. Betimes, before sunrise, he goes to the convent refectory, and paints till the shadows close in on him, nor does the brush fall from his hands, nor does he remember food and drink. Sometimes he lets whole weeks go by in which he touches not his paints. Sometimes he will stand for two hours on the scaffold before the picture examining

The Cenacolo, Milan.

Photo by Anderson.

it and criticising what he has done. At other times I have known him rush forth in the mid-day heat through the blazing streets, being drawn by some viewless power to the monastery; he will mount his scaffold, do two touches or mayhap three, and rush away at once.

*

He is working at the countenance of the Apostle John. To-day he should have completed it. Instead he remained at home with the child Jacopo, watching the flight of hornets, wasps, and flies. So absorbed is he in studying the construction of their bodies that 't would seem on it depended the destiny of the human race. Having perceived that the hind legs of flies serve them as a rudder, he experienced greater pleasure than if he had found the secret of perpetual felicity. He thinks the discovery useful, and like to serve his apparatus for flight. Poor Apostle John!

*

To-day there is a new distraction, and the flies are abandoned. The Master is working on a design, beautiful and wondrous delicate, which is to form the coat-of-arms of an academy not yet existing outside the brain of the Duke. The device is a square containing a crown of cords, geometrically intertwined, in knots without beginning or end. I could not restrain myself, but reminded him of the unfinished Apostle. He shrugged his shoulders, and without raising his

eyes from the crown of cords, he said through his closed teeth:

"Patience! time enough! The head of John will not run away!"

I begin to comprehend Cesare's malice!

*

The Duke has entrusted to him the construction within the palace of hearing-tubes concealed in the thickness of the walls, after the fashion of the Ear of Dionysius. Leonardo began with ardour, but now has cooled and catches at every pretext for laying the work aside. The Duke hurries him and is wroth; this morning he summoned him several times to the palace, but the Master is occupied with experiments on vegetables. He has cut away the roots from a pumpkin, leaving but one small shoot, which he assiduously drenches with water. To his great joy the plant has not withered. "The mother," says he, "nourishes well her children." Sixty little oblong pumpkins have formed.

*

Cesare says Leonardo is the greatest of the libertines. He has written a hundred and twenty volumes on matters of natural science, but all in fragments, in dispersed notes on flying leaves; and he keeps a MS. of over five thousand pages in such disorder that he himself cannot find anything in it.

*

Coming into my little room, he said: "Giovanni,

have you noticed that small rooms dispose the mind to profundity, large ones to breadth? And have you observed how the images of things, seen through the shadow of rain, are clearer than in the sunlight?"

*

Two days of work on the head of John the Apostle. But, alas! something has been lost through flies, pumpkins, cats, and the Ear of Dionysius. He has again failed to complete the head, and now, disgusted with his paint-box, retired into geometry. He says that the odour of the paint nauseates him, and the sight of the brushes. Thus the days pass; at the caprice of chance, and submitting to the will of God, we, as it were, lie in port waiting for a wind. Fortunately he has forgotten the flying-machine or we should starve.

What to others appears perfection is to him teeming with error. He aims at the highest, at the unattainable, at what is for ever beyond the reach of the hand of man. Therefore his productions rest incomplete.

*

Andrea Salaino has fallen sick. The Master nurses him, sits up at night, watches by his pillow; but no one dare speak to him of medicine. Marco d'Oggionno surreptitiously introduced a pill-box, but Leonardo found it, and cast it from the window. Andrea himself desired to be bled, and

spoke of a most skilled phlebotomist of his acquaintance; but the Master grew properly indignant, speaking of all doctors with epithets most injurious.

"Heed rather to preserve than to cure your health; and beware of physicians." He added with a smile, good-natured yet malicious, "Every man scrapes up his money only to give it to them, the destroyers of lives."

*

The Master has taken in hand a treatise on painting; the Lord knows when he will finish it. Latterly he has been much busied (I likewise, helping him) with aërial and line perspective, both in light and shade, and he has given me discourses and fugitive thoughts upon art. I will now write down such as I can remember of the noblest of sciences; and may those into whose hands these pages shall fall, remember in their prayers the soul of the great Florentine Master, Leonardo da Vinci, and the soul of Giovanni Boltraffio, his humble disciple.

*

The Master says: "All which is beautiful, even humanly beautiful, dies, except in art. (*Cosa bella mortal passa e non d'arte.*)

"He who despises painting despises the philosophical and refined contemplation of the world. Painting is the grandchild of Nature and the kinswoman of God."

"*Il pittore deve essere universale.* O painter, be thy variety infinite as the phenomena of Nature! Carrying on what God has begun, seek to multiply, not the works of men's hands, but those of the eternal hands of God. Imitate no one; let thy every work be a new phenomenon of Nature."

*

"For him who is master of the fundamental natural laws; for him who *knows*, it is easy to be universal; because all bodies, whether of men or of beasts, are really formed on the same principles."

*

"Take heed lest in thee the greed for gold suffocate the love of art; and remember that the conquest of glory excels the glory of conquest. The memory of the rich perishes with them, the memory of the wise endures forever; because science and wisdom are the legitimate children of their father, and money is but his bastard. Love glory, and be not fearful of poverty. Consider how many philosophers have laid down the wealth to which they were born, that they might enrich their souls with virtue, and have lived content in misery."

*

"Knowledge rejuvenates the soul, and lightens the burden of old age. Therefore gather wisdom, that thou mayest gather sweets for thine age."

"There is a generation of painters who, to hide their meagre knowledge, shelter themselves behind the beauty of gold and azure, and say they give not of their best because of the scanty payment they receive, and that they could surpass any man were they as well rewarded as he. O fools! what hinders them to make something beautiful, and to say, 'This picture is such a price, and this other is less, and this third least of all'; showing that they have work for every price?"

*

"Not infrequently the lust for gold brings even the good masters down to the level of craftsmen. Thus my countryman and comrade, Perugino the Florentine, arrived at such rapidity of execution, that once he replied to his wife, who called him to dinner, 'Serve the soup while I paint one more saint!'"

*

"The artist who has no mistrust of himself will never attain to the supreme heights of art. Well for thee if thy work be higher, ill for thee if it equal, woe to thee if it fall below, thine own estimation! Pitiful is that artificer who, persuaded that he has produced a masterpiece, questions wonderingly how God can have helped him to such purpose."

*

"Listen with long-suffering to the criticisms which men pass on your picture; and weigh their words to see if, perchance, they, faulting it, be in

the right. If they be right, correct; if they be wrong, feign deafness; or if they be persons worthy of notice, show them their error. The judgment of an enemy is often nearer the truth than the judgment of a friend; hatred is often profounder than love. The intellect of him who hates, sees and penetrates better than the intellect of him who loves. A true friend is like thyself; but an enemy resembles thee not, and in this is his strength. Hatred throws light. Remember this, and despise not the criticisms of thine enemy."

*

"Bright colours captivate the vulgar, but the true artist seeks not to please the vulgar, but the elect. His pride and his aim is not in the dazzling by colour, but in the performance of a miracle, namely, that by the play of light and shadow, things which are flat should appear round. He who, neglecting the shadows, sacrifices them to the splendour of tinting, is like the vain babbler who sacrifices significance for sounding and furious words."

*

"Above all, beware of coarse, sharp outlines. The shadows on a young and delicate body should be neither dead nor stony, but light, evasive, and transparent like air; for the human body is itself transparent, as you can convince yourself by looking through your fingers at the sun. Too brilliant a light gives not good shadows; wherefore be wary of it. Observe the tenderness and

charm on the faces of men and women as they pass along the shadowed street between the dark walls of the houses under twilight on clouded days. This is the most perfect light; your shadow, gradually vanishing into the light, will fade like smoke—like a soft music. Remember that between the light and the dark there is something which participates in both; a bright shadow or a dark light. Seek for it, O painter! for therein lies the secret of captivation—of charm."

These words he spoke, and raising his hands as if wishing to imprint the lesson on our memories, he repeated, with indescribable emphasis: "Reject coarse and heavy outlines; confound your shadows in the light, letting them vanish little by little, like smoke; like a tender music."

Cesare, who was listening attentively, raised his eyes and smiled, as if about to dispute; nevertheless he remained silent.

* * *

Later, speaking on another topic, Leonardo said:

"Falsehood is so shameful that even in praising God it dishonours Him. Truth is so excellent that in speaking of the vile it ennobles. Between truth and falsehood there is a difference no less than between light and darkness."

Here Cesare, suddenly struck by an idea, fixed scrutinising eyes on the Master.

"How?" he said. "Yet, Master, have you not told us that between the darkness and the light

Kneeling Figure (Leonardo da Vinci, Windsor).

Photo by Mansell.

there exists an intermediary, something which participates in both, and is, as it were, bright shadow and dark light? Then, between truth and lie—but no, 't is absurd. Master, your metaphor lands me in great temptation! For the painter who, you say, seeks enslaving charm in the compounding of light and shadow, may rightly seek also the twilight between true and false."

At first Leonardo frowned, and seemed indignant that one of his pupils should exhibit such an obsession; then he replied, smiling:

"Tempt me not! Get thee behind me, Satan!"

I had expected a different answer; to my thinking, Cesare's words merited better than an idle jest. In me, at any rate, they excited a tumult of strange and tormenting ideas.

*

To-night I beheld him, standing in the rain in a close and fetid alley, absorbed in the contemplation of certain spots of dampness on a stone. He stood there a long while, and the urchins in the street nudged each other and mocked him. I asked him what he beheld in the stone.

"Giovanni," he said, "see the splendid monstrous figure! Chimera, with her jaws wide; and beside her an angel with flying hair and airy flight, fleeing from the monster. The caprice of chance has produced a picture worthy of a great artist."

He traced with his finger the outline of the damp spot, and to my amazement I recognised that what he said was true.

"Many," he said, "think this habit of mine an absurdity; but experience has taught me how useful it is for the education of the fancy. I have taken from such things what I wanted, and brought them to completeness. Listen to far-off bells; you can find in their confused clang the very names and words you lack."

*

For tears the eyebrows contract; for laughter they expand.

The Master goes gladly with those condemned to death, watching in their faces the degrees of their agony and terror; and the very executioners wonder at him, when he makes a study of the last quivering of the muscles.

"Nay, Giovanni, you understand not the man he is!" cried Cesare. "He will lift a worm from the path lest his foot crush it; but if his own mother were a-dying he would watch the contracting of her eyebrows, the wrinkling of her forehead, the drooping of the corners of the mouth."

*

"Note the expression and the gestures of deaf-mutes."

*

"When you watch persons, do it without letting them know; so shall their movements, their laughter and their tears be more natural."

*

"An artist whose own hands are angular and

bony is apt to depict people with angular and bony hands; for every man likes the faces and the bodies which resemble his own. The ugly painter will choose ugly models, and *vice versâ*. Let not the men and the women whom you paint seem your blood brothers either in beauty or in deformity. This is a fault which attaches to many Italian artists. In painting there is no error more treacherous. I consider the temptation arises from the fact that the soul makes the body which belongs to it. Of old it shaped and fashioned it in its own likeness; and now when again it is called upon to fashion a new body with brushes and paint, it yearns to reproduce the shape in which it has long had its habitation."

*

The Master tells us: "'T is not experience, the mother of all arts and sciences, which deceives men, but imagination, which promises them what experience cannot give. Experience is not to blame, but our own vain and senseless lusts. Experience would have us aim at the possible, and not strive ignorantly for what we can never obtain; lest we become the prey of despair."

When we were alone Cesare repeated these words, and cried as in disgust:

"Hypocrisy and lies!"

"How has he lied?" asked I.

"Not to aim at the impossible! not to follow the unattainable! Well, it may be some one will

believe his words, but 't will not be I nor you! I have penetrated to his inmost soul."

"And what see you there, Cesare?"

"All his life through, he has done nothing but aim at the impossible, nothing but follow the unattainable! What else is he about in this machine to turn men into birds, in that other to set them in water like fish? And the chimerical monsters he finds in the spots on walls and in the outline of the clouds; and the mystic charm of divine faces seen in angelic visions—whence does he derive all this? From experience? From his diagram of noses, and his ladle for measuring out paint? Why does he deceive himself? Why lie? His mechanical studies are for the performance of a miracle; for raising himself into heaven by flight, for using natural forces to do that which is against Nature. He stretches out towards God or Devil, he cares not which, provided 't is something unexampled, beyond possibility. The less is his faith, the greater is his quenchless curiosity."

These words of Cesare's have filled my soul with anxiety. For several days I have thought them over: I would fain forget them, but I cannot.

To-day, however, the Master, as if in answer to my doubts, has said to me:

"A little knowledge puffs up; great knowledge makes humble. Blasted ears raise proud heads; those full of grain bow down."

"Then," asked Cesare, with his accustomed ironic smile, "how happed it that Lucifer, prince

of the cherubim, and renowned for wisdom, was moved by wisdom not to humility, but to pride that cast him into hell?"

Leonardo did not answer at once; presently he told us this fable:

"Once a drop of water aspired to reach the sky. Winged by fire, it rose up in fine steam. But mounted on high it met air still finer and very cold, and the fire deserted it. Then it shivered and grew heavy, and, its presumption changing into terror, fell as rain. And cast down from heaven it fell upon the earth, and was drunk up by dryness; and for long time it was shut up in prison underground, and there did penance for its sin."

He added no more, but I thought I understood.

*

The longer I live with him the less I know him. To-day he has again been playing like a child. And such strange pranks! Before going to bed I was sitting in my chamber reading my favourite book, *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*, when suddenly a cry rang through the house from our old woman, the kind and faithful Maturina:

"Fire! Help! Help! Fire!"

I rushed out. An appallingly thick white smoke filled the Master's studio. He was there himself, standing among clouds like some ancient mage, and illumined by unearthly blue flames. His face was merry, and he looked jovially at the pale and

terrified Maturina, and at Marco, who had rushed in with two buckets of water, to empty over the drawings and manuscripts strewing the table. Leonardo, however, stopped him, saying it was all a jest. Smoke and flames came from a heated brazier containing a powder of frankincense and resin. I cannot say which took the greater pleasure in the joke, Leonardo or the little scamp, that jackanapes Jacopo. Only a good man could laugh as does Leonardo! I swear it is not true what Cesare says of him! The Master set down in his note-book the effect produced by terror upon Maturina's wrinkles.

*

He speaks scarce at all of women. Once, however, he said that men maltreat them even as they do their beasts. He ridicules the platonic love which is the fashion; and when a certain youth read to him a peevish sonnet in the manner of Petrarch, he replied in three lines, about Petrarch's loving Laura merely to season his own daily food.

Cesare says that Leonardo has so wasted himself on mechanics and geometry that he has had no time for love of women. But he adds, depend upon it he is no Galahad; he must certainly have embraced a woman at least once, out of mere curiosity.

*

I should never have talked to Cesare about Leonardo. We seem to watch him like spies, and

Cesare finds a malevolent pleasure in detecting new blots in his character. And what does Cesare want with me? Why does he poison my mind?

We now frequently visit a scurvy little tavern by the Cantarana Canal, just beyond the Porta Vercellina. We talk for hours over a half-flagon of sour wine, amid the oaths of boatmen who finger filthy cards and lay plots together for extortion. To-day Cesare asked me if I knew that at Florence Leonardo had been accused of immorality. I could not believe my ears, and thought him raving or drunken. Then he told me the story in detail. When Leonardo was twenty-four years of age, and his master, the famous Florentine, Andrea Verrocchio, forty, an anonymous charge against them both was put into one of those round wooden boxes called *tamburi*, which hang on the pillars in the churches, most notably in the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore. In April "the guardians of the night and of monasteries" inquired into the matter, and acquitted the accused on the condition, however, that the charge should be repeated. The fresh accusation was made in June, and they both were finally acquitted. Nothing more was heard of the accusation; but Leonardo soon left Verrocchio and Florence, and came hither to Milan.

"Oh, doubtless, 't is an abominable calumny," said Cesare, with his meaning smile; "though, friend Giovanni, you do not yet know what contradictions nestle in his heart. 'T is a labyrinth

so intricate that even the Devil would lose himself therein. He certainly appears chaste, but——"

I had started to my feet, probably pale enough, and cried:

"How dare you, Cesare?"

"What the devil is the matter with you? Calm yourself. I will say no more. I was a hundred miles from *that* construction——"

"What are you insinuating? Speak out!"

"What folly is this? Why so hot? Is it worth the separating of two such friends as we? Rather let us drink. To your health, sir. *In vino veritas.*"

And we drank and resumed our talk.

But no, no! this suffices! I will forget it; I will abstain from speaking of the Master with this man. Cesare is not his enemy alone, but also mine. He is a bad fellow.

Now I feel nauseated. It is odious to see the hideous delight some men feel when they have thrown mud upon the great.

*

The Master says: "Thy strength, O painter, is in solitude! When you are alone you belong wholly to yourself (*Se tu sarai solo tu sarai tutto tuo*), but if you have even one companion then you are only half your own; possibly less than half if your friend be indiscreet. If you have many friends you fall deeper into the same slough. And if you say,'I will withdraw myself, and practise the con-

Andrea Verrocchio (Lorenzo di Credi, Florence).

Photo by Alinari.

templation of Nature,' you will not succeed, for you will be lending one ear to the chatterings of your friends, and inasmuch as no man can serve two masters, you will perform ill the duties of a friend, and still worse the observances of art. And if you say, 'I will withdraw beyond the reach of their voices,' then you will be reckoned a madman, and you practically end by being alone.

"But if you must have company, let it be that of the painters and scholars in your studio; all other friendships will be to your detriment. Remember, O painter, that your strength is in solitude!"

Leonardo consorts not with women, because his soul must be absolutely free.

*

Sometimes Andrea Salaino complains that our existence alternates between the monotony of hard work and the tedium of inaction; and he declares that the pupils of other masters lead a gayer life. He is as fond of fine clothes as a maid, and would like the noise of feastings and merriment and the fire of amorous eyes.

Leonardo to-day, having overheard the reproaches and laments of his favourite, stroked his long curls affectionately and said, smiling:

"Be of good cheer, lad. I 'll take you to the next feast at the castle. Meantime, shall I tell you a fable?"

Andrea clapped his hands like a child, and threw

himself at the Master's feet, all attention. Leonardo began:

"Once upon a time a large stone, lately washed up by the stream, lay in a retired place high up above the road and surrounded by trees, moss, flowers, and grasses. Looking down on the road he saw a number of stones like himself, and he said: 'What profit have I here among these short-lived plants? I will descend among my kinsmen and live with stones like myself.' Thereupon he rolled himself down to the road, and took a place amongst his brothers. And the wheels of heavy wains ground him, and the hoof of the ass, and the nailed boot of the pedestrian. Then he lifted himself a little, and thought he should breathe more freely; but, lo! became bespattered with mud, and the droppings of animals; and his former fair retreat in the garden of flowers seemed to him a paradise. Thus it is, Andrea, with those who leave their meditation and plunge into city disquiet."

*

The Master permits harm to no living creatures, not even to plants. Zoroastro tells me that from an early age he has abjured meat, and says that the time shall come when all men such as he will be content with a vegetable diet, and will think on the murder of animals as now they think on the murder of men.

*

To-day we passed by a butcher's shop, and he

pointed to the dead carcases of calves and oxen and pigs, and said with disgust: "Truly man is the king of beasts, for his brutality exceeds theirs." And then added sorrowfully: "We live by the death of others. We are burial-places."

*

God forgive me, I have again been with Cesare to that accursed tavern! We spoke of the Master's compassionateness for animals.

"You refer, Giovanni, to his eating no flesh?"

"It may be so. I know——"

"You know nothing! Messer Leonardo is not moved by goodness, but by the love of singularity."

"What mean you by that?"

He laughed somewhat forcedly.

"Peace. Let us not quarrel. Wait, and I will show you certain of his drawings—i' faith, very interesting drawings."

So upon our return we crept, thief-like, into the Master's studio. Cesare rummaged till he had found a certain concealed sketch-book which he showed to me. My conscience pricked me; nevertheless I looked with interest.

They were drawings of colossal bombards, explosive balls, many-barrelled guns, and such like engines of war, executed with no less delicacy than he lavished on the divine countenances of his Madonnas. Especially do I remember one bomb, half a *braccio* in diameter, called "Fragilità," the construction of which Cesare explained to me.

It was cast of bronze, the hollow within being filled with layers of gypsum. Leonardo had written on the margin beside the sketch:

"Most beautiful bomb. Very useful. After leaving the gun it ignites while one might pronounce an *Ave Maria.*"

"*Ave Maria!*" cried Cesare. "How does this use of a Christian prayer please you, my friend? You see the breed of his inventions! And have you heard his definition of war?"

"No."

"'*Pazzia bestialissima*, the most brutal of madnesses.' A pretty definition, methinks, for the inventor of these engines. Here is your holy man who eats no flesh, who lifts a worm from the path lest a boot should tread on it! Both one and the other simultaneously! to-day a devil, to-morrow a saint. A Janus, with one face toward Christ, the other towards Antichrist. Which is the true Leonardo, which the false! Who can say? And he does it all with a light heart, with a mystic seductive grace. *He is at play.*"

I listened in silence, a chill like the chill of death piercing my heart.

"Eh? What is the matter, friend Giovanni? Quite chapfallen? You take it overmuch to heart. Oh, you 'll soon be used to it, just as I am. And now let us go back to the *Tartaruga d'oro*, and sing:

'Dum vinum potamus
Fratelli cantiamo

A Bacco sià onore!
Te deum laudamus.'"

I said no word, but fled from him.

To-day Marco d'Oggionno said to the Master:

"Messer Leonardo, they accuse us of too scanty church-going, and of work on holy days as on others."

"Let bigots talk at leisure, and heed them not," answered Leonardo. "The study of Nature is well-pleasing to God, and is akin to prayer. Learning the laws of Nature, we magnify the first Inventor, the Designer of the world; and we learn to love Him, for great love of God results from great knowledge. Who knows little, loves little. If you love the Creator for the favour you expect of Him, and not for His most high goodness and strength, wherein do you excel the dog who licks his master's hand in the hope of dainties? But reflect how that worthy beast, the dog, would adore his master could he comprehend his reason and his soul! Remember, children, love is the daughter of knowledge; and the deeper the knowledge of God the greater the fervency of love. Wherefore in the Scripture it is written, 'Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves.'"

"But who," retorted Cesare, "can combine the sweetness of the dove with the cunning of the serpent? To my thinking we must choose between the two."

"Not so," cried Leonardo; "there must be a

fusion. I TELL YOU PERFECT KNOWLEDGE OF THE UNIVERSE AND PERFECT LOVE OF GOD ARE ONE THING AND THE SAME."

*

How fain would I return to thy silent and holy cell, O Fra Benedetto! Tell thee all my grief, and fall upon thy breast, that thou mightest pity me and remove from my soul this burden, O beloved father! O gentle shepherd, who dost abide by the word of Christ—"Blessed are the poor in spirit!"

*

At times the Master's face is so peaceful and innocent, so full of dove-like harmlessness, that I am ready to pardon all, to believe all, to trust him with my very soul. Then of a sudden the subtle lines of his lips take on an expression so incomprehensible, something which so inspires me with fear, that I seem to be looking through the transparency of water into the profundity of the abyss. There is in his soul some impenetrable mystery; and I recall one of his sayings:

"Very deep rivers flow underground."

*

The Duke Gian Galeazzo is dead; and they say that Leonardo has been the occasion of his death by means of poisoned fruit. God is my witness, that 't is not of my own will I lend an ear unto this terrible accusation, and that I would fain reject it out of hand. Yet there stands ever before my

eyes that vision of the tree, with its leaves distilling dew, and its fatal fruit maturing in the greenish mist, lit by the moon, pregnant with terror and death. Oh, that I had never seen it!

"Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it, for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

*

Out of the depths I cry unto Thee, O Lord! Lord, hear my voice; let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! Like the thief upon the Cross, I confess Thy name: Remember me, O Lord, when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.

*

Leonardo has begun to work on the countenance of the Christ.

*

The Duke has commanded him to construct an engine for raising the Holy Nail. With mathematical accuracy he weighs in a scale the instrument of the Passion of the Saviour, as if it were a fragment of old iron; so many ounces, so many grains. To him it is only a figure among figures; a part among parts of a lifting machine; ropes, wheels, levers, and pulleys.

*

Says the Apostle: "Little children, it is the last

time: and as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists, whereby we know that it is the last time."

*

To-night a crowd of people demanding the Holy Nail surrounded our house, crying, "Sorcerer! infidel! poisoner! Antichrist!" Amused, Leonardo listened to the howl of the mob, and when Marco would have discharged his arquebus at them, it was the Master who restrained him.

The Master did not change from his impenetrable serenity, and when I fell at his feet supplicating a word, a single word, to dispel my doubts—and I swear by God I should have believed him—he would not or could not speak.

Little Jacopo, stealing out, evaded the crowd, and having met the guard of the captain of justice, led them to the house: and at the instant when the doors were giving way under the weight and the blows of the crowd, soldiers took them in the rear, and the rioters scattered. Jacopo is wounded, struck on the head by a stone, and like to die.

*

To-day I assisted in the cathedral at the Feast of the most Holy Nail. At the moment recommended by the astrologers it was raised on high. Leonardo's machine acted without a hitch: neither rope nor pulley was visible. Through clouds of incense the round casket with the

crystal sides and the golden rays in which the Nail was set, rose of itself like the rising sun. 'T was a triumph of mechanics! The choir sang:

"Confixa clavis viscera
Tendens manus vestigia
Redemptionis gratia,
Hic immolata est Hostia."

Then the casket was arrested and lodged in a dark niche above the high altar, surrounded by five ever-flaming lamps.

The Archbishop intoned:

"O Crux ben dicta quæ sola fuisti digna portare Regem cælorum et Dominum, Alleluia!"

The whole assembled multitude fell on their knees repeating Alleluia!

And the usurper of the throne of Milan, Ludovico the assassin, prostrated himself with the rest, and weeping, raised his hands to the Holy Nail.

After which the populace was glutted with wine, with the flesh of beasts, with five thousand measures of pease, and six hundredweight of salt. Forgetting their murdered lord, they feasted and drank, and cried—*"Viva Il Moro! Viva il Chiodo!"*

Bellincioni has composed some hexameters, in which we learn that by virtue of the ancient nail of iron the age of gold shall be renewed.

After leaving the cathedral the Duke came to

Leonardo and embraced him; kissing his lips, calling him his Archimedes, and thanking him for the beautiful machine, he promised to present him with a pure-blooded Barbary mare and two thousand imperial ducats. Then, condescendingly tapping him on the shoulder, he said: "Now you 'll have time to finish the head of your Christ."

*

"A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways."

I can no longer endure my torment; I perish; I become crazed! My reason loses itself in the duplicity of these thoughts.

Fly, fly, ere it be too late!

*

I rose in the night-time, tied up my clothes and my books in a bundle, took a thick stick, felt my way through the darkness to the studio, where I left on the table the thirty florins which I owe for the last six months' teaching—I have sold my mother's emerald ring to do this—and without leave-takings, abandoned Leonardo's house for ever.

*

Fra Benedetto tells me that from the time I left him he has not ceased to pray for me; and he has had a revelation in his sleep that God has brought me back into the true path. He is faring to Florence to visit his sick brother, a

Dominican in the monastery of San Marco, where Fra Girolamo Savonarola is Prior.

*

Praise and thanksgiving unto Thee, O Lord! Thou hast brought me out of the shadow of death, from the mouth of the pit. I renounce to-day the wisdom of this world, upon which is the seal of the dragon with the seven heads, the beast which walketh in darkness, which is Antichrist. I renounce the fruit of the poisonous tree of knowledge, the pride of vain understanding, of that wisdom which is inimical to God, of whom the Devil is the father.

I renounce every aspiration after the enchantments of the world. I renounce all that is not subordinated to Thy glory, Thy will, Thy wisdom, O Christ!

Illumine my soul with Thy light, deliver me from fatal duplicity of thought; make sure my footsteps in Thy paths, and shelter me under the shadow of Thy wings.

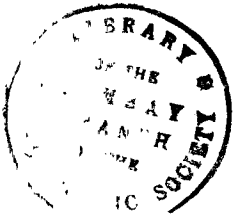
My soul, praise the Lord! I will praise the Lord so long as I have my being; I will yet sing praises unto my God.

*

Two days hence, Fra Benedetto and I go to Florence. I desire, with the blessing of this my

second father, to enter as novice in the Convent of San Marco, under the guidance of the holy and elect Fra Girolamo Savonarola.

Here ends the diary of Giovanni Boltraffio.



BOOK VII

THE BONFIRE OF VANITIES—1496

"Dov' è più sentimento, li è più, ne' martiri, gran martire."
LEONARDO DA VINCI.

(He who feels most is the greatest of the martyrs.)

"A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways."
ST. JAMES i., 8.

I

MORE than a year had passed since Giovanni Boltraffio had been received as a novice in the Convent of San Marco.

On a winter's day, towards the close of the carnival of 1496, shortly after noon, Fra Girolamo was writing the account of a vision which had lately appeared to him. He had seen two crosses waving above the city of Rome, one black and enveloped in storm, inscribed—"The Cross of the fury of the Lord"; the other of gleaming azure, with the inscription—"The Cross of the Lord's mercy."

February sunshine flooded the narrow cell with its white and naked walls, great black crucifix, and the thick parchment books in antique leather.

Now and then from the blue sky came the joyous twitter of the swallows.

Fra Girolamo felt unwonted weariness, and now and then trembled. Laying down his pen, he dropped his head on his hands, closed his eyes, and meditated upon what he had that morning heard about Pope Alexander VI. from Fra Paolo, a monk who had been on a secret mission to Rome. Monstrous images like those described in the Apocalypse passed and whirled before the mind of the Prior; he saw the blood-stained bull of the shield of the Borgias, reminding him of Apis, the heathen god; the golden calf borne before the Pontiff instead of the humble Lamb of God; nightly orgies at the Vatican in the presence of the Holy Father, of his favourite daughter, and of the College of Cardinals; the beautiful Giulia Farnese, mistress of the sexagenarian Pope, and the model for contemporary portraits of the saints; his two sons, Cesare, the young Cardinal of Valenza, and Giovanni, the Duke of Candia, who out of criminal love for Lucrezia, their sister, hated each other to the point of fratricide. And haunted by what Fra Paolo had scarcely dared to whisper, the tale of the strange relations between the Pope and this Lucrezia, his daughter, Girolamo trembled.

"But no, 't is calumny. It were too great an enormity! God sees that I cannot believe it," he murmured.

But in the depths of his soul he felt that nothing

St. Catherine (Said to be the portrait of Lucrezia Borgia), Pinturicchio, Rome.

Photo by Anderson.

was impossible in that terrible nest of the Borgias, and drops of cold sweat stood out upon his forehead. He had fallen on his knees before the crucifix, when a low knocking was heard at the door of his cell.

"Who is it?"

"It is I, father."

He recognised the voice of his trusty friend, Fra Domenico Buonvicino.

"Ricciardo Becchi, secret legate from the Pope, prays for an audience."

"Good. Let him wait. Meanwhile send me Fra Silvestro."

Fra Silvestro Maruffi was epileptic and of weak intellect, but Fra Girolamo, considering him a chosen vessel of the grace of God, both loved and feared him. He interpreted Maruffi's visions according to the precise rules of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Schoolmen, finding by ingenuity, by the arguments of logic, by enthymemes, apophthegms, and syllogisms, prophetical meaning in the vain babble of an idiot. Maruffi showed no respect for his superior, insulted him publicly, and even struck him; offences which Fra Girolamo received with the utmost meekness. So that if the people of Florence were in the hands of Savonarola, Savonarola was in the hands of the half-witted Maruffi.

Having entered, Fra Silvestro sat on the floor and scratched furiously at his red and naked feet, chanting a monotonous song. His face was

freckled, with a sharp nose, and a hanging lower lip. His rheumy eyes of a dull green were melancholy.

"Brother," said Savonarola, "the Pope has sent me a secret messenger. Tell me, shall I receive him? What should I say? Have you had any voice or vision?"

Maruffi grimaced, barked, and grunted. He had great gifts in the imitation of animals.

"Beloved brother," said Savonarola, "be kind! Speak! My soul faints under the burden of mortal sadness. Pray God that He illuminate thee with His spirit of prophecy."

The other opened wide his mouth and rolled his tongue; his face was strangely contorted; and he burst out angrily:

"Why should you trouble me, you tedious talker, you sheep's-head, you brainless quail? May the rats devour your nose! You have made your bed—lie on it. I am neither prophet nor counsellor."

He paused, looked at Savonarola from under his scowling eyebrows, and continued more quietly:

"Brother, I 'm sorry for you! But as for my visions, how know you if they come from God or from the Devil?"

Silvestro closed his eyes. His countenance took an expression of repose. Savonarola held his breath in holy expectancy.

Suddenly Maruffi opened his eyes, slowly

turned his head like one listening, looked out of the window, and a smile of good-nature, peace, almost of intelligence, brightened his face.

"The birds!" he said; "do you hear the birds? To be sure, the grass is springing in the meadows, and the first little yellow flowers! 'T is enough. It 's time to think of God now. Come! let us flee this sinful world; let us flee together to the desert!" And rocking himself, he began to sing in a sweet, lazy voice.

Suddenly he sprang to his feet, ran to Savonarola, seized his hand and cried, choking with excitement:

"I have seen—I have seen— May the rats devour your nose! You head of an ass—I have seen——"

"Speak, dear brother; speak quickly!"

"Flames! Flames!" cried Maruffi.

"Well? And besides?"

"Flames rising from a stake, and in the midst of the flames a man——"

"Who?"

Nodding his head, and motioning with his hand, Silvestro did not reply at once; then fixing his penetrating eyes on the other, he laughed softly and foolishly, and murmured:

"Thou!"

Fra Girolamo shuddered, paled, and drew back involuntarily. Maruffi turned away, and shambled out of the cell, singing:

"Hie we to the smiling woods,
The shy retreat of spring,
Where the streams unsealèd flow,
And the yellowhammers sing!"

Recovering himself, Fra Girolamo gave orders to admit His Magnificence Ricciardo Becchi.

II

This man, Scriptor of the Papal Court of Chancery, entered Savonarola's cell, rustling a long silk garment shaped like the habit of a monk, but of the modish violet colour, and with hanging embroidered sleeves lined with fox-skin, his whole person emitting a perfume of musk. The studied grace of his movements, his pleasant and intelligent smile, his calm eyes, his dimpled and well-shaven cheek, showed him a master of dignified urbanity. He bent in a courtly reverence, kissed the hand of the Prior of San Marco, and asked his blessing; then entered upon a long speech in Latin beflowered with Ciceronianisms and resounding sententiousness. He began with what in the rules of oratory is called the appeal for good-will, dilating upon the fame of the Florentine preacher; then he gradually approached the mission entrusted to him. The Holy Father, though righteously angered by Fra Girolamo's refusal to present himself in Rome, nevertheless burning with zeal for the Church's good, for the perfect union of the

The Cell of Savonarola.

Photo by Alinari.

faithful in Christ, and for the peace of the whole world, declared his fatherly readiness, in the event of Fra Girolamo's repentance, to restore him to favour.

Savonarola raised his eyes and said very quietly:

"Messere, what think you? do you believe that the Holy Father and our lord has faith in Christ?"

Ricciardo allowed this unseemly question to pass without reply; he continued to dilate on his mission, giving the Prior to understand that if he submitted himself, the red hat of a Cardinal awaited him in Rome; then, bowing a second time, and touching Savonarola's hand with his lips, he added insinuatingly:

"One little word, Father Girolamo, one little word, and the red hat is yours."

Savonarola fixed his unflinching eyes on the speaker, and said slowly:

"And if I refuse to submit, Messere? If I refuse to hold my peace? If the infatuated monk prefer to continue his barkings as the faithful watch-dog of the house of God?"

Raising his eyebrows in a faint grimace, Messer Ricciardo looked at the monk, then turned his eyes to his beautiful almond-shaped nails, and adjusted his priceless rings. Presently he drew slowly from his pocket, unfolded, and handed to the Prior a bull of excommunication, to which nothing was lacking but the papal seal. In it Savonarola was

called the son of perdition, "the most contemptible of insects," *nequissimus omnipedum.*

"And you are waiting for an answer?" asked the monk quietly, when he had read the document.

The Scriptor assented with a light nod of his head.

Savonarola rose, and flung the bull at the feet of the emissary.

"There," he said, "there is my answer! Return to Rome and tell him who has sent you that I accept his challenge. Minister of Antichrist! We shall see whether he will excommunicate me, or whether it is I who shall drive him out of the pale of the Church!"

The door of the cell was softly opened and showed the head of Fra Domenico who, hearing the sonorous voice, was anxious to know what could be taking place. The monks were massed round the entrance.

Messer Ricciardo, who had cast several furtive glances at the door, now said politely:

"May I remind you, Fra Girolamo, that I am charged only with a private mission?"

Savonarola moved to the door, and throwing it wide he cried: "Hear all of ye; for not only to you but to the whole people of Florence I will proclaim the infamous traffic which has been proposed to me, choice between the Cardinal's purple and the excommunication of the *Curia Romana!*" Under his low forehead his sunken eyes shone like coals; his ill-shaped lower jaw

trembling with wrath and almost satanic hatred and pride.

"Yea, the hour has come! I will thunder against you, all ye prelates and cardinals of Rome, even as once the Holy Fathers thundered against the pagans. I will force the key of this unclean house; the Church of God, which you have slain, shall hear my cry: 'Lazarus, come forth!' and shall raise its head and issue from its tomb! What need I your mitres and your cardinals' hats? Give me the red hat of death: the blood-stained crown of martyrdom!"

III

Among the monks who crowded to hear these words of Savonarola was the novice, Giovanni Boltraffio. When the company had dispersed, he too descended by the main staircase of the convent, and sat in his accustomed spot under the portico, where at this hour reigned solitude and calm.

The court was surrounded by the white monastery walls, and in it grew laurels, cypresses, and a thicket of damask roses. Report said that these roses were watered by angels. Fra Girolamo loved to preach amongst them.

The novice opened the Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, and read: "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils; ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table and of the table of devils."

Then he rose and paced the cloister, recalling his thoughts and emotions during the year he had spent within the walls of San Marco. After the moral torture of the preceding months, he had at first experienced great peace in this retreat among the disciples of Savonarola

Sometimes Father Girolamo would lead them out beyond the confines of the city. Following a steep path, which seemed to lead to heaven, they climbed the heights of Fiesole, from which the City of Flowers, surrounded by smiling hills, appeared like some silver vision. The Prior would seat himself in a meadow, enamelled with iris, tulips, and violets; the monks reclined in a circle round him, and talked and danced and frolicked like so many children, or played on viols and citherns, like those which the *beato Angelico* placed in the hands of his angels, circling as they sing in the choir of heaven. Fra Girolamo did not preach nor play the master, but talked affectionately and took his part in the games and laughter. And Giovanni, looking at the radiant smile on his countenance, there on the retired Fiesole hill, under the heaven of most pure azure, hearing the vibrating tones of the stringed instruments, and the voices blended in holy song, fancied himself an angel in the paradise of God. Sometimes at dawn Savonarola would walk to the edge of the slope, and look down on his Florence, bathed in the morning mist, even as a mother looks on her

sleeping babe, and from below would rise the first clanging of the bells announcing the beginning of day, like the sleepy babble of a half-awakened child.

And on summer nights, when the fireflies moved through the embalmed air like the torches of unseen angels, and the roses exhaled their mystic odour in the convent-yard, Fra Girolamo would tell of the stigmata of St. Francis, of the wounds, perfumed like roses, which her divine love had impressed on the tender body of St. Catherine. The brethren sang:

"Fac me plagis vulnerari,
Fac me Cruce inebriari,
Ob amorem Filii."

And Giovanni would tremble in the anguished expectation of miracle—the trembling hope that rays of fire, springing from the cup of the Holy Sacrament, would burn his body likewise with the sacred wounds of the Crucified. "*Gesù, Gesù mio, amore!*" he sighed, fainting in voluptuous ecstasy.

Once the Prior sent him on a mission to the Villa Carreggi, two miles from Florence, where Lorenzo dei Medici had long sojourned, and at last had died. In one of the deserted saloons, lit by a ghostly light coming through the chinks of the shutters, Giovanni saw a picture of Botticelli's, called *The Birth of Venus.*

White as a water-lily, bedewed with the briny

freshness of the sea, standing on a pearly shell, the goddess floated over the waves, veiled in the abundant gold of her serpentine tresses, which she gathered in her hand. The fair naked body breathed the enticement of sin; yet was there a strange pathos in the pure childlike lips and the innocent eyes.

Giovanni shuddered; for it seemed to him that the face of the goddess was not new to him; he looked long at it, and remembered that he had already seen that countenance, those ingenuous, dewy eyes, those innocent lips with their tender sadness in another picture by that same Botticelli—a picture of the Mother of God. Inexpressible consternation filled his soul; he averted his eyes and fled from the villa.

Returning to Florence by a narrow lane, he saw at the angle of a cross-way an ancient Rood, and he sank on his knees and prayed for the driving from him of temptation. But at that moment came the trill of a mandoline from the roses behind the wall; a voice cried out, then murmured in a frightened whisper, "No, no—leave me!" and another voice replied, "Beloved! Love!—my love!" and then the mandoline fell, and a kiss was heard.

Giovanni sprang to his feet, reiterating, "*Gesù! Gesù!*" but this time he dared not add "*amore!*"

"Here also is *she!*" he said; "everywhere! in the face of the Madonna, in the words of the

St. Catherine Receiving the Stigmata (Sodoma, Siena).

Photo by Alinari.

holy hymns, in the breath of the roses which crown the crucifix!"

And hiding his face in his hands he fled, as if escaping from an unseen persecution.

Back in the convent, he went to Savonarola and told him all, and the Prior exhorted him to fight against the Devil by fasting and by prayer; and when the novice sought to explain that this torment was not the temptation of fleshly lust, but the seduction breathing from all the beauty of pagan antiquity, Savonarola, uncomprehending, at first showed astonishment, then told him sternly that he lied in thinking there could be aught in the pagan gods but concupiscence and pride. All beauty was contained in the Christian virtues. And Giovanni, not having found the looked-for comfort, from that day forth was possessed by the demons of restlessness and revolt.

Once Boltraffio heard Fra Girolamo, discoursing on painting, insist that every picture should have some moral utility for men, exciting them to the practice of those ascetic virtues which alone are healthful for the soul. And he added that the Florentines would do a work well-pleasing to God if they should destroy, at the hands of the executioner, all those images which entice to sin.

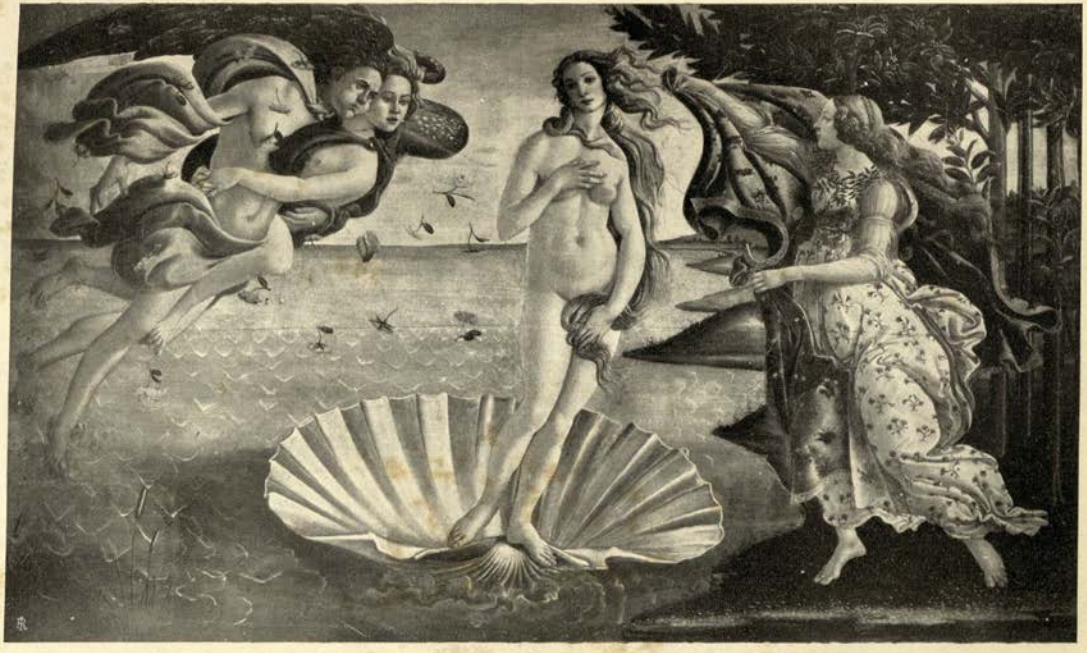
Then he went on to speak of knowledge: "That man is a fool," he said, "who conceives that by logic and by philosophy the truths of faith can be confirmed. Does a strong light need the help of a weak one? or the divine wisdom

that of the human? Which of the apostles and the martyrs studied philosophy and logic? An old woman who can neither read nor write, but who prays fervently before the image of a saint, is nearer to the knowledge of God than all the sages and philosophers of the world. Neither logic nor science will stead them in the day of judgment: Homer and Virgil, Plato and Aristotle, all go to their end in the house of the Devil; because, like the sirens, bewitching the ear with magic songs, they draw souls to eternal ruin. Science gives men stones for bread, and, verily, if you look at those who follow the teaching of this world, you will find in them that even their hearts are become as stones."

"Who knows little, loves little. Great love is the daughter of great knowledge!" had said Leonardo da Vinci.

Only now did Giovanni realise the profundity of these words, as he listened to the anathema of the monk against knowledge and art, and remembered the wise reasonings of Leonardo, the calm of his countenance, his cold look, his wise and enchanting smile. Not that he had forgotten the poisoned tree, the Ear, the crane for the Holy Nail, but now he felt that he had not fathomed the depth of his Master's soul, had not penetrated into the mysteries of his heart, nor untied the prime knot in which all the threads must meet.

Such were the memories upon which Giovanni looked back at the end of his first convent year.



The Birth of Venus (Botticelli).

Photo by Anderson.

Deep in thought he paced the darkening cloister, till the evening had fallen and the *Ave Maria* rang through the dusk. The monks wended to the chapel, but Giovanni remained outside, reseating himself.

Then with a bitter smile he raised his eyes to the silent heaven, where shone the evening star, the torch of Lucifer, the most beautiful of angels, the bringer of light, son of the morning.

He returned to his cell and slept: towards the dawning he dreamed. And in his dream he was with Monna Cassandra, astride of a black goat, and fleeting through the morning air. "To the Sabbath! to the Sabbath!" cried the witch, turning to him her clear amber eyes; and he knew in her the goddess of earthly love, she with the heavenly sadness in her eyes—the *diavolessa bianca.* The full moon shone on her body. Sweet odours almost overpowered him. His teeth chattered with desire and with fear. "*Amore! Amore!*" she cried and laughed, and the black goat-skin sank beneath them. Away! Away! they careered.

IV

Giovanni was awakened by the sun, by the sound of bells and of childish voices. He dressed hurriedly, and descended into the court where was a great crowd of people, and among them children all dressed in white, and carrying olive-

branches and small red crosses. It was "The Sacred Legion of the Child Inquisitors," founded by Savonarola to watch over and reform the purity of morals in the town. Giovanni mixed in the crowd, and listened to their talk.

Then a wave passed over the ranks of the sacred troop; innumerable small hands waved the olive-branches and the red crosses above their heads, acclaiming Savonarola, who was entering, and a chorus of silver voices intoned a psalm in his honour:

"*Lumen ad revelationem gentium et gloriam plebis Israel.*"

The children made a circle round the Prior, covering him with a rain of violets and anemones, and they knelt before him, kissing his feet. Illumined by a ray of the sun, silently, with a tender smile, the worn-faced Savonarola blessed them.

"Long live Christ, King of Florence! Hallelujah to Christ, the King of Florence! Hail Mary, Blessed Virgin, and our Queen!" shouted the young voices.

The captains gave the order to march, drums beat, flags fluttered, and the sacred troop moved off. For in the Piazza della Signoria was prepared the pyre for the burning of the vanities, and the children were once more to make the circuit of the city to collect "vanities and things under anathema."

V

When the court was clear, Giovanni saw Messer Cipriano Buonaccorsi, Master of the noble Guild of the Calimala, the lover of pagan antiquities, on whose property by the Hill of the Mill the marble figure of the goddess of Love had been found. They greeted each other warmly, and spoke for some time. From Messer Cipriano, Giovanni learned that Leonardo had come from Milan, charged by the Duke to purchase such works of art as could escape the Legion of Children. Giorgio Merula was with the painter. Presently Messer Cipriano asked Giovanni to conduct him to Savonarola. The Master of the Calimala entered Fra Girolamo's cell, and Giovanni waiting outside heard their talk. Messer Cipriano offered twenty-two thousand gold florins if he might buy all the books, the pictures, the statues, and other treasures which were ordained for the burning. Savonarola refused. Messer Cipriano increased his offer by eight thousand florins. To this the monk deigned no reply; only his stern and rigid face became yet sterner and more rigid. Buonaccorsi's toothless mouth quivered. He wrapped his fox-skin cloak round his shivering knees; he sighed heavily, and closing his myopic eyes, he said in his quiet voice: "Well, Father Girolamo, I will ruin myself. I will give you all I possess: forty thousand florins."

Savonarola grimly raised his head. "And

what were your profit," he asked, "if you ruined yourself?"

"I was born in this city," replied Messer Cipriano. "I love my land; and for no condition in the world can I endure that we, like the barbarian hordes, should destroy the masterpieces of wisdom and of art."

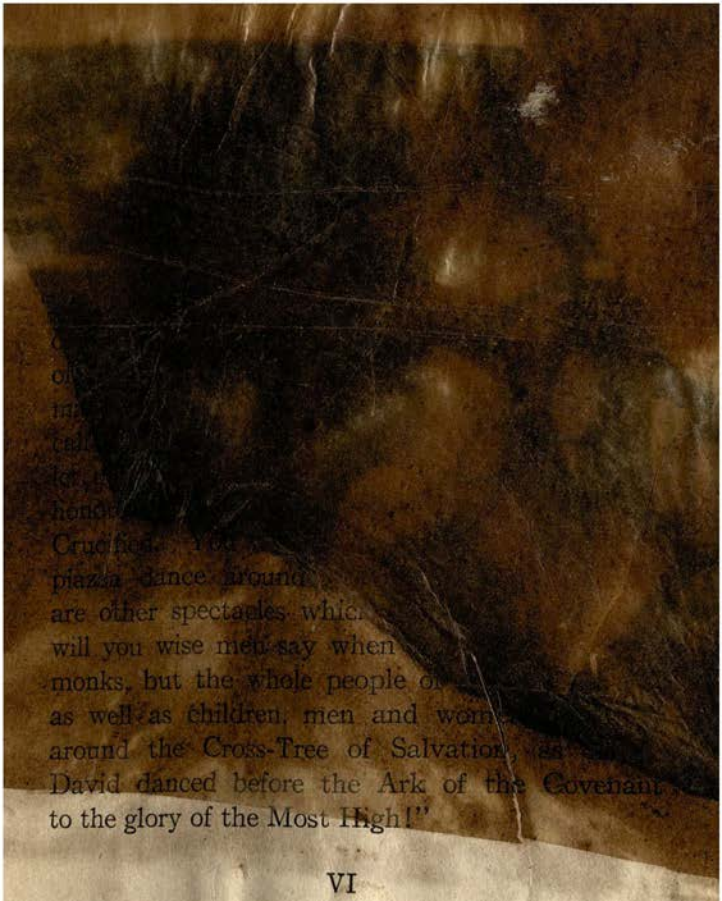
"Would that thou didst love thy heavenly country as thou lovest thine earthly one, my son!" exclaimed the monk, turning on the old man a look full of admiration; "but be consoled; only things meet for burning shall be burned. What induces to wickedness and vice cannot include anything of beauty, as, indeed, your same wise ancients have said."

"Alas, Father!" returned the merchant, eagerly, "are you certain that babes can distinguish so precisely between the evil and the good?"

"Truth and innocency are in the mouth of babes. 'Except ye become as children ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.' Is it not written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent?' Messere, I pray day and night that God may enlighten my babes, so that by His Holy Spirit their minds may be opened to discover all the vanities of science and of art."

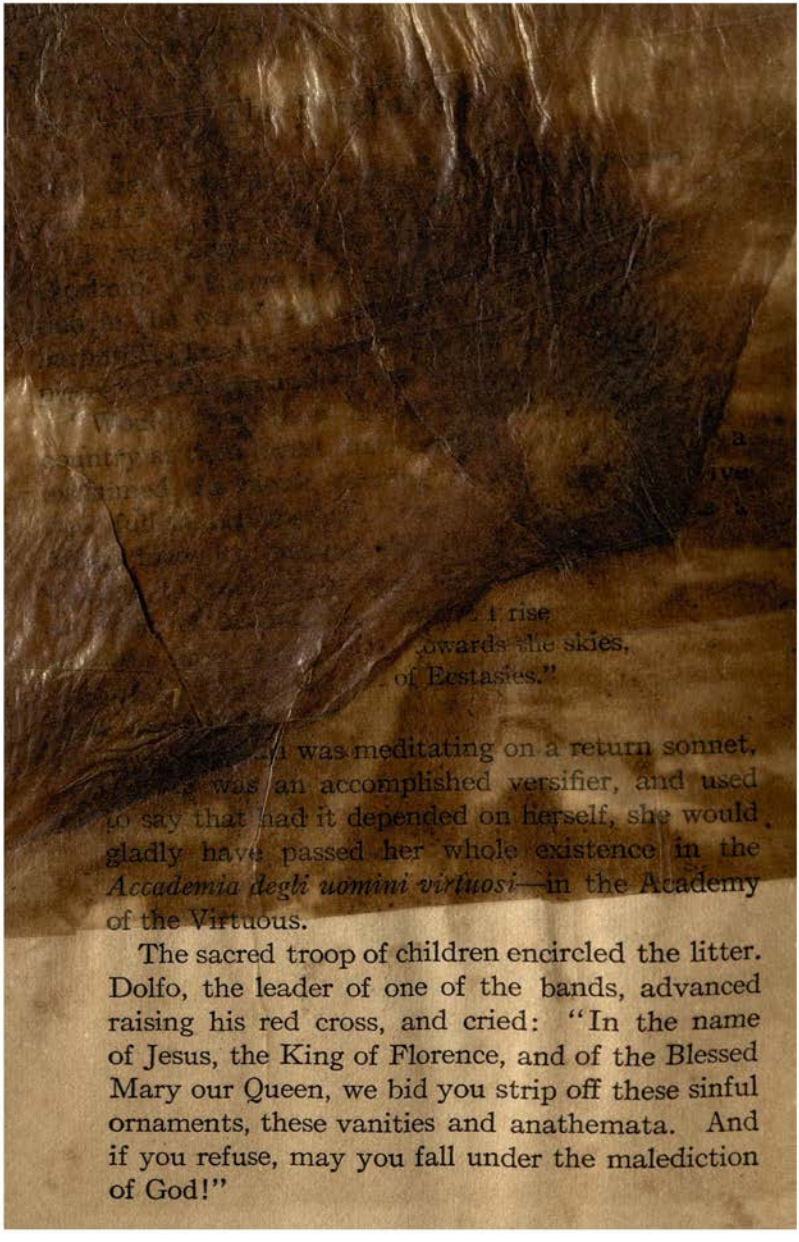
"I beseech you to consider—perhaps even a part——"

"You are wasting your breath, Messere. My decision is unalterable."



VI

Leaving the Prior's cell, Giovanni Boltraffio turned his steps towards the Piazza della Signoria. In Via Larga he met the sacred troop. The children had stopped a palanquin carried by black slaves, in which reclined a woman gorgeously attired. A lap-dog slept on her knee, a parrot and a monkey were on perches by her side, the



...rise
...owards the skies,
... of Ecstasies."

...was meditating on a return sonnet, ... was an accomplished versifier, and used to say that had it depended on herself, she would gladly have passed her whole existence in the *Accademia degli uomini virtuosi*—in the Academy of the Virtuous.

The sacred troop of children encircled the litter. Dolfo, the leader of one of the bands, advanced raising his red cross, and cried: "In the name of Jesus, the King of Florence, and of the Blessed Mary our Queen, we bid you strip off these sinful ornaments, these vanities and anathemata. And if you refuse, may you fall under the malediction of God!"

Venetian Courtesans (Carpaccio, Venice).

Photo by Anderson.

The dog suddenly awakened began to bark, the monkey chattered, the parrot, flapping its wings, screamed out a verse it had learned from its mistress:

"Amor che a nullo amato amar perdona!"

Lena was about to bid her attendants rid her of the crowd when her eyes fell on Dolfo, and she beckoned to him.

The boy came, his eyes on the ground.

"Away with these ornaments!" shouted the children. "Away with the vanities and the anathemata."

"Ah, you handsome boy!" said the courtesan softly, disregarding the cries of the crowd. "Mark you, my little Adonis, I would willingly give you all my poor toys, but the matter is they are not mine own!"

Dolfo raised his eyes; and Lena, with a scarcely perceptible smile, nodded as if confirming his secret thoughts, then added caressingly, in her soft Venetian accent: "In the Vicolo de' Bottai, near the Santa Trinità, ask for Lena, the lady from Venice. I 'll be expecting you."

Dolfo looked round and saw that his followers had become involved with a party of Savonarola's enemies (called the *Arrabbiati*, the Enraged), and had forgotten the courtesan. It was his duty to bid them fall upon her, but suddenly he felt himself vanquished, and flushed and hung his head.

Lena laughed, showing her white teeth; and behind the sumptuous Cleopatra and Queen of Sheba there shone out the Venetian "Mammola," the saucy street-girl, mischievous and naughty.

The slaves lifted the litter and she pursued her way unmolested, spaniel on lap; the parrot settled down on his perch; only the monkey still grimaced, and tried to snatch the pencil with which the courtesan was beginning verses to the bishop:

"My love is purer than a seraph's sigh. . . ."

Dolfo, meantime, preceding his company, but without his former braggadocio, mounted the stair of the Palazzo dei Medici.

VII

In the dark, silent, and spacious halls of the Medicean palace, where all breathed the solemn grandeur of the past, the children became awe-struck. But when the shutters had been flung open, the trumpets had blared, and the drums beat, then the youthful inquisitors scattered themselves through the rooms, shouting and laughing, and singing hymns, and executing the judgment of God on the sins of learning and art, gleefully prying into vanities by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Giovanni watched them at work, and noted some who, with frowning foreheads, hands de-

cently folded, and the gravity of judges, paced among the statues of the philosophers and heroes of pagan antiquity. "Pythagoras, Anaximenes, Heraclitus, Plato, Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus," read one of the boys from the Latin inscriptions on the marble bases.

"Epictetus?" said Federici, with the tone of a profound connoisseur, "that is the particular heretic who permitted all pleasures and denied the existence of God. He merits burning; 't is a pity he is marble."

"Never mind," cried the cross-eyed Pippo, "we 'll have him in to the feast."

"Nay," interposed Giovanni; "you are confounding Epictetus with Epicurus."

He was too late; down came Pippo's hammer so clean on the philosopher's nose that the boys yelled in admiration.

"Epictetus or Epicurus, it 's all one! If it is n't the broth, it 's the sippets of bread! They shall all go to the house of the devil," they cried quoting Fra Girolamo.

However, contention arose before a picture of Botticelli's. Dolfo declared it was the naked Bacchus pierced by the shafts of love, but Federici, whose eye for "anathemata" rivalled Dolfo's, examined the picture attentively and pronounced it a portrait of Stephen the proto-martyr.

The children stood round in perplexity, for the attire and the expression of the figure in nowise suggested a saint.

"Don't you believe him!" cried Dolfo; "'t is Bacchus, the abominable Bacchus!"

"You blasphemer!" shouted Federici, raising his crucifix for weapon, and the two boys fell upon each other with such good-will that their followers could hardly separate them. The picture was left for future consideration.

Standing in wondering groups, the children rummaged amongst the properties of old carnivals —amongst the horrid masks of satyrs, grapes for bacchantes, bows, amongst quivers, and wings of Eros, the wands of Hermes, the tridents of Poseidon. Finally, drawing them forth amid shouts of laughter, they lighted on the wooden, gilded, cobwebbed thunderbolt of Jupiter Tonans, and the moth-eaten body of the Olympian eagle, with moulted tail, and wires and nails protruding from his perforated crop. A rat jumped out from the dusty golden wig once worn by Aphrodite; girls screamed, jumped on the couches, and gathered up their petticoats. The shadows of terrified bats beating against the ceiling seemed the wings of unclean spirits, and a chill of horror and repulsion settled on the children as they touched this heathen lumber, this sepulchral dust of deities.

Dolfo running up announced that there was yet another room, its door guarded by a little, bald, furious, red-nosed, detestable man, who was hurling blasphemy and curses, and would permit no one to pass. The troop filed off to recon-

noitre; and Giovanni, following them, found in the janitor his friend the bibliophile, Messer Giorgio Merula.

Dolfo gave the signal for attack; Messer Giorgio stood before the door preparing to defend it with his body. The children fell upon him, rolled him over, beat him with their crosses, searched his pockets till they had found the key, and opened the door. It was a small room with a library of precious books.

"Here, here!" suggested Merula, cunningly, "the books you seek are in this corner. You need n't waste your time over the top shelves. There 's nothing there."

But the inquisitors heeded him not. All that came to hand they piled in a vast heap, especially the books in rich bindings. Then they opened the windows and flung the fat folios straight into the street, where carts were being loaded with "vanities." Tibullus, Horace, Ovid, Apuleius, Aristophanes, rare copies, unique editions flew through the air before Merula's very eyes. He rescued one small volume and hid it in his bosom. It was the history of Marcellinus, containing the life of Julian the Apostate. Seeing on the floor a delicately-illuminated manuscript of the tragedies of Sophocles, he snatched it up and made piteous supplication:

"Children, dear children! spare Sophocles. He is the most innocent of poets. Let him alone! Let him alone!"

And he pressed the precious leaves convulsively to his breast, but finding them tear beneath his too loving hands he burst into sobs and groans, dropped his treasure, and cried in impotent fury:

"Know, ye sons of dogs, that one line of this inestimable Sophocles is worth all the prophecies put together of your madman, Fra Girolamo."

"Old man, if you don't want to be taken by the heels and thrown after your pagan poets, you 'll hold your tongue!" cried the children, dragging him from the library.

Then leaving the palace, they passed by Santa Maria del Fiore, and marched to the Piazza della Signoria.

VIII

In front of the dark and slender tower of the Palazzo Vecchio the pyre stood ready. It was thirty cubits in height, one hundred and twenty in circumference; an octagonal pyramid with at least fifteen steps. On the lowest were the comic masks, dresses, wigs, and other carnival properties; on the next three, profane books from Anacreon and Ovid to the *Decameron*, and the *Morgante Maggiore* of Messer Luigi Pulci. Above the books were the instruments of female beauty—washes, essences, mirrors, puffs, curling-tongs, hairpins, nail-nippers. Still higher were lutes and mandolines, cards, chessmen, balls,

dice—all the games by means of which men serve the devil. Then came drawings, voluptuous pictures, portraits of light women; lastly, on the summit of the pyramid, the gods, heroes and sages of pagan antiquity, made of wood and of coloured wax. Above the pile, towering higher than anything else, the figure of Satan was enthroned, the lord of all "vanities and things accursed," a monstrous puppet, filled with gunpowder and sulphur, with goat's legs and a hairy skin, like Pan, the ancient god of the woods.

It was evening: the air was cold, but serene and clear, and one by one the stars were beginning their nightly shining. The crowd in the piazza surged and swayed, and pious murmurings filled the air. Hymns went up from Savonarola's followers—*Laudi spirituali*—which, retaining the rhymes, the metre, and the air of carnival songs, had been radically changed in words and sense. Giovanni listened, and the incongruity between the lively music and the gloomy words resounded in his ears like some barbarous funeral chant.

"Hope with Faith and Love agrees,
Take three ounces each of these;
Two of tears, and mix them well
On the fire of Fear.
Let them boil for minutes three,
Spice them with Humility,
Adding Grief to make the spell
Of this madness clear;

Lo! my soul, I offer thee
A most sov'ran remedy,
Worthy cure for every ill,
Called by man a madness still."

A man on crutches, paralysed but not old, his face quivering like the wing of a wounded bird, approached Fra Domenico Buonvicino and handed him a parcel.

"What is it," asked the friar; "more drawings?"

"A matter of anatomy. Yesterday I forgot to hand it over, but to-night a voice reproved me: 'Sandro,' it said, 'you have still "vanities and anathemata" in the loft above your shop.' So I got up and hunted for these drawings of nude bodies."

The monk took the parcel with a good-natured smile.

"We shall light a famous fire, Ser Filippepi!" he said.

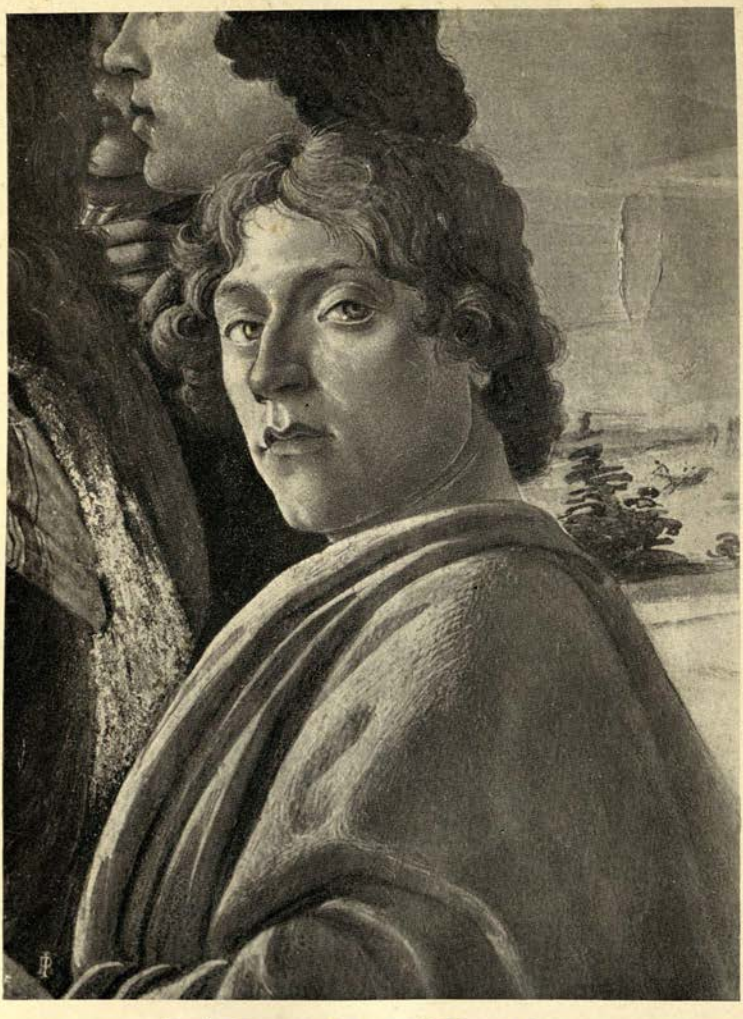
The paralytic looked at the pyramid and heaved a profound sigh.

"Lord! Lord! have mercy on us miserable sinners! And to think that but for Fra Girolamo we should be still in our sins! And even now, who knows if we shall save our souls?"

He crossed himself and murmured prayers, fingering his rosary.

"Who is that?" Giovanni asked of Fra Domenico.

"Sandro Botticelli," was the answer, "son of Ser Mariano Filippepi the tanner."



Sandro Botticelli (by himself, Florence).

Photo by Alinari.

IX

When at last the curtain of night had fallen upon Florence, a whisper ran through the crowd.

"They come! They come!"

Slowly, silently, without torches, without hymns, the procession advanced. Before the white-robed troop of the child inquisitors was borne the waxen image of the child Jesus, pointing with one hand to his crown of thorns, with the other blessing the people. After the children came monks, the clergy of the whole town, the *gonfalonieri*, the magnificent gentlemen of the Council of Eighty; the cathedral canons, the doctors of theology, the magistrates, the cavaliers, the guards of the Bargello, the heralds and trumpeters. Upon reaching the piazza the procession stood still, and a deathly silence came over the multitude, such as precedes an execution. Then Savonarola mounted the *Ringhiera*, a stone platform before the Palazzo Vecchio, lifted the crucifix, and commanded in sonorous tones:

"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, kindle the flame!"

Four monks approached the pyre with torches, and immediately fire broke out at the four opposing corners. The flames crackled, and a smoke at first grey, then blackening, rose in wreaths to heaven. Trumpets sounded, the monks chanted a canticle in honour of the Lord, and the children sang in chorus:

"*Lumen ad revelationem gentium et gloriam plebis Israel.*"

The great bell of the Palazzo Vecchio rolled a solemn and majestic sound upon the air, and was answered from all the belfries of the town. The fire rose ever fiercer and more brilliant; and the delicate parchment leaves of the old books curled up and perished. From the lowest step a bunch of false hair rose flaming and floated away, amid the jeers and laughter of the crowd. Among the people were some who prayed, some who wept; others screamed and danced, and waved their arms and kerchiefs and caps; others prophesied.

"Sing, brothers, sing unto the Lord a new song!" shouted a limping shoemaker with wild eyes: "All the world is crumbling! burning, burning to a horrible destruction, even as these vanities in the purifying fire—all—all—all!—Church, laws, governments, powers, arts, learning—one stone shall not be left upon another!—there shall be a new heaven and a new earth; and God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor weeping nor sickness! O Lord Jesus, come! come!"

A young woman, with a thin and suffering face, pregnant, no doubt the wife of some poverty-stricken artisan, fell on her knees, spreading her hands towards the flame, as if in very truth she saw in it a vision of the Christ Himself; then

starting up and calling like one possessed, she cried:

"My Jesus! my Jesus! Come, Lord Jesus! Come!"

X

Among the objects burning at the stake Giovanni could not take his eyes off a picture lighted up but not yet touched by the flame. It was by Leonardo: a shining white Leda, lying on the waves of a mountain-girdled lake, among the low-toned reflections of twilight. A great swan spread his wings over her, bending his long neck, and filling the sky and the earth with his triumphant hymn of love, while Leda watched her twin sons. Giovanni stared at the advance of the flame, his heart beating high in nervous horror.

Just then the monks elevated a sombre cross in the centre of the square, and in honour of the Trinity made themselves into three circles, joining their hands; then testifying to the spiritual joy of the faithful, they danced, first slowly, then faster and faster, till at last they were as a mighty whirlwind, and they sang the while:

"*Ognun gridi com' io gridol Sempre pazzo, pazzo, pazzol*"

"Each and all with me cry out,
Ever madly, madly shout!
All that wise men follow after
Jesu's fools delight in spurning,

Riches, honour, feasting, laughter,
Pomp and pleasure, golden earning—
Unto those things fondly turning
That to wisdom hateful be:
Grief, and pain, and penury.
Christians still may boast of madness—
Never was there greater gladness,
More delightsome solace never
Than for love of Jesu ever
Thus to rage in holy madness."[1]

The heads of the spectators reeled, and their hands and feet were set in motion; suddenly children, men, feeble women joined in the frantic dance. One old and unwieldy monk, like an aged faun, tripped, fell, and was hurt so that the blood flowed; he was flung aside, barely escaping trampling, and the dance rolled on. The fire's crimson and flickering glow lighted convulsed faces: a vast shadow was thrown by the crucifix, the moveless centre of the whirling circles.

"If of wit my mind doth show,
Jesu, in Thy Courtesie,
Rid it thence and let me know
Ever only phrenesie!
For of all philosophie,
Wisdom, prudence, and the rest,
Loathing such hath me possessed
That I would only ask for madness.

[1] Hieronymo Benivieni.

Jesu mine, it doth appear
Wisdom all and man's contriving
In God's sight is folly mere;
All things else but vainest striving,
Saving Thee, Thou fount reviving,
Whence flow out such waters rare,
That who slakes his thirst once there
For love of Thee is seized with madness."

At last the creeping flame had reached the Leda, with its scarlet tongue had licked the pure body, flushed as if living, and grown momentarily yet more mystic and exquisite. Giovanni gazed, shuddering and turning pale, and for him Leda smiled her last smile; then dissolving in the fire, like a cloud in the sunrise, she was lost for ever.

And now the flame had attained the huge devil on the apex of the pyramid: its paunch, filled with powder, burst with a tremendous crash. A pillar of fire rose to the sky. The monster tottered on his blazing throne, bowed, fell, and was scattered in a powder of dying embers.

Drums and trumpets sounded. All the bells pealed, the crowd raised a roar of triumph, as though Satan himself had perished in the flames of the holy pile, together with all the falsehood, pain, and sins of the whole earth. Giovanni clapped his hands to his temples and would have fled. But a hand was laid upon his shoulder; he turned and looked: beside him stood Leonardo, with his quiet untroubled face. The Master

took him by the hand and drew him forth from the crowd.

XI

They moved from the square, pervaded by clouds of stifling smoke, and, lit up by the glow of the dying bonfire, by an obscure lane they took their way to the banks of the Arno. Here all breathed quietness and calm; the stream glided by, gently murmuring: the stars scintillated, coldly brilliant, and the moon bathed the hills in a flood of silver glory.

"Giovanni," said Leonardo, "why did you forsake me?"

The disciple raised his eyes and tried to speak; but his voice died in his throat, his lip trembled, and he burst into tears.

"Master—forgive me!"

"You have done me no wrong."

"I knew not what I did," murmured Boltraffio. "How, O God! how could I have left you?"

He would have told his sufferings, his madness, the anguish of his terrible doubts. But as when at Milan he had stood before the *Colossus* of Francesco Sforza, he felt that Leonardo would have no comprehension; and in hopeless entreaty he looked into his eyes—eyes clear, calm, and alien as the stars.

As if divining the conflict in his soul, the Master did not question him; he smiled with infinite

kindness, and laying his hand on the young head he said:

"God help you, my poor boy; you know I have ever loved you as my favourite son! Will you come back to me? I will receive you with joy."

Then, scarce audibly, as if speaking to himself, he added:

"The deeper the sensitiveness, the greater the grief. A martyr among the martyrs!"

From afar came the clash of the bells, the scream of the chant, the cry of the frenzied mob. But Master and pupil were happy.

BOOK VIII

THE AGE OF GOLD—1496–1497

"Tornerà l'età dell' oro
Cantiam tutti: 'Viva il Moro!'"

BELLINCIONI.

(The Age of Gold shall brighten as of yore,
And all exulting sing, "Long live the Moor!")

I

BEATRICE D'ESTE, Duchess of Milan, sat in her boudoir writing a letter to her sister Isabella, wife of the Marchese Francesco Gonzaga, lord of Mantua:

"Most excellent madonna and well-beloved sister, I and *il Signor* Ludovico, my spouse, desire your good health, and that of *il Signor* Francesco, your illustrious consort.

"In obedience to your desire I send you the portrait of Massimiliano, my son, only I pray you not to conceive of him as of the smallness here indicated. I would send you the precise measurements of how tall he is, but that I am afraid, for the nurse tells me such measurement would impede his growth. He grows *amazingly*. If

I see him not for a couple of days, I find him so greatly enlarged that I jump for joy.

"Here at Court we have a great grief: the little fool Nannino hath died. You, my sister, knew him and loved him well; you will therefore comprehend that while I might have replaced any other loss, Nature herself could not fill the void left by Nannino, since in this being, formed expressly for the delight of princes, she had united the perfection of imbecility with the most entrancing hideousness. Bellincioni has composed a most elegant elegy, declaring that if Nannino is in heaven then all paradise must laugh, if he is in hell even Cerberus grinneth. We have buried him, with many tears, in our family tomb in St. Maria delle Grazie, beside my favourite falcon, and the memorable bitch Puttina. Death shall not wholly separate me from so delightful a possession. I have wept for two entire nights, and Ludovico, my lord, in the hope to console me has promised me for a Christmas gift a magnificent silver bedside seat, ornamented with a relief of the fight between the Centaurs and the Lapithæ. Its interior will be of pure gold, very massive, and it hath a baldachin of velvet, embroidered with our ducal arms. A similar seat has no other prince, neither the Pope, nor the Emperor, nor the grand Turk. It will excel in beauty that one famed by Martial in his epigram. My lord, Ludovico, had wished Leonardo da Vinci to contrive a musical-organ in its interior,

but he hath excused himself on some flimsy pretext, such as the finishing of his *Colossus*, or his *Cenacolo*. You prayed me, beloved sister, to lend you this painter for a time. With pleasure would I accede to your request, and verily not lend but give him to you for ever; but my lord, Ludovico, for what reason I cannot say, is exceeding well-disposed toward this man, and would not consent to his removal for all the gold in the world. Be not disappointed overmuch, for verily this Leonardo is occupied to such a degree with alchemy, mechanics, magic, and other such like follies, that he scarce attends to his painting; secondly, he executes all commissions with a slowness that would lose an angel his patience; thirdly, he is an infidel.

"Of late we have had a wolf-hunt. They do not permit me to mount on horseback, for I am now advanced in my fifth month; but I watched the hunt from the high platform of a conveyance made expressly for me, in form like a pulpit. I assure you that in this box I was rather tortured than diverted. When the wolf made his escape into the forest I wept with rage. Had I been upon my horse I swear he should not thus have got away, though I had broken my collar-bone.

"My little sister, do you recall how we used to leap our horses? And how Penthesilea fell in the ditch and almost destroyed herself? And the boar-hunt at Cusnago? And the tennis? and the angling? What fine times were those!

"Here we amuse ourselves as best we can. We play at cards, and we skate, which is a most pleasing diversion, introduced among us by a Flemish gentleman, for the winter is very severe, and not only the lakes but likewise the rivers are completely frozen. In the park Leonardo hath built out of snow a most elegant Leda embraced by the swan. Pity 't is that in the spring it will melt!

"And you, delightful sister, how fare you? And has your breed of cats with long hair succeeded well? If you have a male kitten with tawny hair and blue eyes, I pray you to send him with the young negress you have promised me; I will give you in exchange my little bitch's next litter.

"Pray you, do not omit to send the model of the wrapper of azure satin with the cross-cut collar and the trimming of sables. I asked for it in my last letter. Pray you, despatch it at once; 't were best to-morrow at daybreak, and by a mounted messenger. And send me also a vessel of your boasted ointment for the king's evil, and some of that foreign wood for the finger-nails.

"Our astrologer predicts a very hot summer, and war. What saith your prophet? One's faith jumps always with the astrologer belonging to somebody else.

"I and Ludovico, my lord, commend ourselves to your gracious remembrance, beloved sister,

and that of your illustrious consort the Signor Marchese Francesco.

BEATRICE SFORZA."

II

Notwithstanding the frank tone of this letter, it was full of finished policy. Beatrice concealed from her sister her private anxieties and annoyances, for, as matter of fact, peace was very far from reigning between husband and wife. The lady hated Leonardo neither for heresy nor atheism, but because he had painted the portrait of Cecilia Bergamini, the Duchess's most detested rival. Of late, also, she had suspected an intrigue with one of her ladies, Madonna Lucrezia Crivelli.

At this time Ludovico was at the zenith of his power. Son of Francesco Sforza—that daring mercenary from the Romagna, half soldier, half brigand—he dreamed of making himself lord of an united Italy.

"The Pope," he boasted, "shall be my chaplain, the Emperor my captain, Venice my treasury, and the King of France my courier."

He signed himself "*Ludovicus Maria Sfortia Anglus Dux Mediolani*," deducing his descent from Anglus the Trojan, companion of Æneas. The *Colossus*, monument to his father, Francesco, with the inscription *Ecce Deus*, was designed as a testimony to the divine origin of the Sforzas.

For all his external prosperity, however, the Duke was tortured by anxiety and secret fear. He knew himself unloved by the people, and reckoned a usurper. Once in the Piazza dell' Arrengo the people, seeing the widow of Gian Galeazzo with her eldest son, had shouted, "Long live Francesco, our rightful Duke!"

The boy was eight years old, and famed for his intelligence and beauty. Marin Sanuto, the Venetian, wrote of him: "The people desire him for their prince, even as they desire God." Beatrice and her husband had recognised that the death of Gian Galeazzo had not been sufficient to make them lords of Milan, since in this child the shade of his father was rising from the tomb.

There was talk in the city of mysterious portents. At night, above the castle towers, a strange glow had appeared as that of a conflagration. In the palace chambers agonising groans had been heard. It was remembered that when Gian Galeazzo had lain dead it had been impossible to shut his left eye, omen of the imminent death of one of his near kinsmen; the eyelids of the Madonna dell' Albore had quivered; outside the Porta Ticinese an old woman's cow had dropped a double-headed calf. The Duchess herself had seen an apparition in the Sala della Rocchetta, had fainted with terror, and refused to discuss it with any one, even her husband. She had altogether lost that vivacity and grace which had been so attractive to her spouse, and, filled

with the gloomiest prognostications, was awaiting the approaching birth of her child.

III

On a melancholy December evening, while snowflakes were slowly falling on the streets of Milan, Il Moro sat in the little detached apartment of the palace in which he had installed his new love, Madonna Lucrezia Crivelli. The flames from the fire on the open hearth lighted up the polished doors with their inlaid views of the ancient buildings in Rome, the moulded and chequered lacework of the ceiling touched up with gold, the walls covered with Cordovan leather and gold hangings, the tall black chairs and settles, the round table, the novel by Boiardo lying open, the sheets of music, the mother-o'-pearl mandoline, and the crystal goblet of *Balnea aponitana*, a spa water, at that time greatly in fashion. On the wall hung the lady's portrait painted by Leonardo. Caradosso had carved the marble reliefs of the chimney-piece—curled serpents gnawing a vine, and naked children, half cherubs, half cupids, playing with the sacred instruments of the Lord's Passion: nails, sponge, lance, and crown of thorns.

The fierce wind howled in the chimney, but within the dainty *studiolo* all was comfort and luxury. Madonna Lucrezia, seated on a cushion at the Duke's feet, was sorrowful, for he had

chided her, the ground of his complaint being that she did not visit Beatrice, his Duchess.

"Your Excellency!" cried the girl, with drooping eyelids, "I beseech you, constrain me not! I am incapable of lying."

"Lying?" echoed Il Moro; "but this is concealment, not lying! Did not the Thunderer himself hide his pranks from his jealous spouse? And Theseus? and Phædra? and Medea? All the gods and heroes of antiquity! We, poor mortals, cannot resist the might of the god of Love. But would it be well to have the evil flagrant? Then you lead your neighbour into temptation, which is contrary to all Christian charity. And charity, you know, covers a multitude of sins."

He laughed; but Lucrezia shook her head and looked at him with her large eyes, innocent and pensive as a child's.

"You know," my lord, "I am happy in your love; but sometimes I fall into such a remorse, remembering that I am deceiving Madonna Beatrice, who loves me as a sister, that I know not how to endure it."

"Enough, enough, my child!" cried the Duke, and drew her to his knee, throwing one arm round her waist, and with the other hand caressing her smooth raven tresses, which were confined by the *ferroniera*, a thread of gold fastened over the brow by a diamond, which glistened like a tear. Lowering her eyelashes she permitted his caresses coldly, and without returning them.

"Ah, if you knew how I loved thee, my gentle one! so sweet, so modest! Thee only!" he sighed, breathing again that odour of violet and musk.

The door opened, and a frightened maid-servant rushed in.

"Madonna! madonna!" she cried; "there! down by the great door! O Lord, have pity on us sinners!"

"Speak!" said the Duke, "who is at the great door?"

"Beatrice, the Duchess."

Il Moro turned pale.

"The key! Quick, the key of the little door! I will go through the court-yard. Give me the key—at once."

"But the cavaliers of Madonna Beatrice are surrounding the house!" cried the servant, wringing her hands.

"Then it 's a trap," said the Duke, rubbing his brow. "But how has she come by the knowledge? Who can have told her?"

"Surely Monna Sidonia, the accursed witch who creeps in to vex us with her unguents and her phials. I warned vou. Madonna. to beware of her."

"What 's to be done? *Dio mio!* What 's to be done?" muttered the Duke, ever paler.

From the street came a violent knocking on the great door and the servant rushed to the staircase.

Lucrezia Crevelli (Leonardo da Vinci, Louvre).

Photo by Neurdein.

"Hide me, Lucrezia. Hide me!"

"Most Excellent, if Madonna Beatrice suspects, she will search the house. Were it not better that you went straight up to her?"

"God forbid! You know not the manner of woman she is. Good Lord, to think what may come of this! Remember her state—the danger to the infant! Hide me; hide me at once—no matter where."

At this moment the Duke more nearly resembled a thief detected than a descendant of Anglus, the companion of Æneas.

Lucrezia took him to her dressing-chamber and hid him in the wardrobe, a large press let into the wall, with white doors inlaid with gold; here he effaced himself in a corner among the dresses.

"What a position!" he said to himself. "Exactly like the ridiculous heroes of Boccaccio or Sacchetti."

Il Moro was, however, in no mood to appreciate the ridiculous side of the adventure. He drew from his bosom a small case with relics of St. Christopher; another containing a morsel of Egyptian mummy, a talisman much in vogue. In the dark he could not distinguish which was which of these treasures, so he kissed them both, crossing himself and praying.

Hearing the voices of his wife and his mistress entering the closet together, he turned cold with fear. But they were talking amicably as though

nothing were amiss, Lucrezia was showing the Duchess her new house, at her own urgent request. Probably Beatrice had no clear proofs of her case, and therefore was dissembling her suspicion. It was a duel of feminine cunning.

"What! gowns here, too?" said the Duchess indifferently, as she approached the press in which her husband had settled himself down half dead with fear.

"Yes, old gowns. What I wear at home. Would Your Excellence like to look?" said Lucrezia, also indifferently, and she partly opened the door.

"Hearken, my dear. Where do you keep that robe I was so fond of—don't you remember?—which you wore at the Pallavicini fête last summer? Little golden caterpillars sparking like fireflies on a purple ground."

"I don't remember," said Lucrezia. "Oh, yes, though—it must be here," and she moved away from her lover's hiding-place, leaving its door ajar, and drew the Duchess to the other wardrobe.

"And she declared she could not deceive!" thought the Duke, pleased notwithstanding his terror. "What presence of mind! Oh, women! 't is from you princes should learn diplomacy."

Presently the ladies moved away into the adjoining apartment, and Il Moro breathed more freely, though he still convulsively clutched at the relics of St. Christopher and the morsel of mummy.

"Two hundred imperial ducats to the mon-

astery of St. Maria delle Grazie for oil and candles, if it ends well!" he vowed.

At last the maid came running, opened the press, and with an air both respectful and sly let the prisoner out, telling him the danger was passed, and the most excellent Madonna Beatrice had been pleased to retire, after taking a gracious leave of Madonna Lucrezia.

Having crossed himself, he returned to the *studiolo*, drank a glass of the *Balnea aponitana* water, looked at Lucrezia, who sat by the fireplace as before, her head drooping, and smiled. Then he stepped cautiously to her side, bent down, and took her in his arms. The girl shuddered.

"Leave me! Leave me, I pray you. I beseech you to go away. How can you do this after what has happened?"

But the Duke, unheeding, covered her face and neck and hair with ardent kisses. He had found a new charm in her unsuspected talent for deception, and never had she seemed to him more lovely.

The December storm still howled in the chimney; but the glow of the fire illuminated the chain of laughing naked children who, among the vine-branches of Bacchus, brandished nail, hammer, spear, and crown of thorns.

IV

For three months, under the direction of

Bramante, Caradosso, and Leonardo da Vinci, preparation had been making for the great ball, decreed by the Duke for New Year's Day. No less than two thousand persons had been invited. On the appointed day, at about five o'clock in the afternoon, the guests assembled at the palace. A snowstorm had damaged the roads; the castle towers and battlemented walls with the loop-holes for the mouths of cannon showed with ghastly whiteness against the heavy clouds. Fires had been kindled in the wide court-yard, and round these were assembled noisy groups of equerries, palanquin-bearers, grooms, couriers, outriders, and their like. Gilded chariots and coaches, very cumbrous, and drawn by cart-horses, were setting down fur-wrapped ladies and cavaliers at the entrance of the palace, or crossing the drawbridge which led to the inner court of the Rocchetta. The frosted windows glittered in the festal illuminations within.

Entering the vestibule, the guests passed between two long rows of ducal guards, Turkish *mamelukes*, Greek *stratiotes*, Scotch bowmen, Swiss *lanzknechts*, all in armour, and bearing heavy halberts. In front of them stood the pages, pretty as maidens, in parti-coloured liveries, the right side pink velvet, the left blue satin, trimmed with swan's-down, and silver-embroidered with the arms of Sforza and Visconti. Their garments were so tight as to display every outline of their lithe and graceful bodies; and in their hands

these charming candle-bearers held torches of red and yellow wax, such as were used in the churches. As each guest entered the great hall, a herald, attended by two trumpeters, proclaimed his style and titles; then a vista opened before him of vast dazzlingly-lighted saloons: "the hall of the white doves on a red field"; "the hall of gold, with the ducal hunting trophies"; "the hall of purple," hung with gold-embroidered purple satin, adorned with buckets and firebrands (the insignia of the Dukes of Milan, who at pleasure could blow up the fire of war, or quench it with the waters of peace). Last was the small and exquisite "black saloon," designed by Bramante, and adorned on walls and ceiling with frescoes by Leonardo, still unfinished.

The richly-dressed crowd buzzed like a swarm of bees. Their attire was iridescent, gorgeous, not seldom tasteless through over-richness, in fashions borrowed from many lands, so that a witty writer of the day said that he read the invasion of foreigners, and the enslavement of Italy, in the garb of his own countrymen. The robes of the ladies, hanging in heavy folds, and stiff with gold and jewels, suggested ecclesiastical vestments. Many were heirlooms handed down from long-forgotten grandmothers. There was ample display of fair shoulders and bosoms, and hair was confined in golden nets, and plaited in thick strands, artificially lengthened by ribbons and false hair. Fashion proscribed eyebrows;

therefore ladies whom nature had disfigured by those superfluities carefully removed them, hair by hair, with steel tweezers called "*pelatoio.*" Rouge, and heavy perfumes such as musk, amber, viverra, and cypress powder, were regarded as mere necessary decencies.

Here and there in the crowd might be seen girls and women inheritors of that peculiar charm only seen in Lombardy, that beauty, as it were, of vaporous shadows, melting like mist into the transparent pallor of the skin; of oval faces, and delicate chiselling of features such as Leonardo delighted to paint.

Madonna Violante Borromeo was by universal consent acclaimed queen of the festival, with her black and brilliant eyes, her tresses dark as night, her triumphant beauty patent to all. Her dress was embroidered with moths burning their wings in flames—a warning to all heedless admirers. Yet it was not Madonna Violante who attracted the eyes of veritable connoisseurs in female loveliness so much as the graceful Diana Pallavicino. Her eyes were clear and cold as ice, her fair hair was almost colourless, her smile calm, her voice slow, melodious, and thrilling as the strings of a viol. She wore a simple dress of white damask with long floating lines, trimmed with ribbons of palest green: amid the noise and splendour of the feast she seemed a being apart, alien, solitary, like a water-lily slumbering on some silent moonlit pool.

Suddenly the horns and trumpets sounded, and all the guests moved to the great Hall of the Tennis Court. Here waxlights burned in fiery clusters upon huge candelabra, and woke sparkles in the golden stars which strewed the azure ceiling-vault. The balcony, in which the choir was concealed, was hung with silken carpets, and with garlands of evergreens.

Punctual to the moment prescribed by the astrologers (for the Duke never moved a step nor, as the wits had it, changed his shirt nor kissed his wife, without first consulting the stars), Il Moro and Beatrice made their entry, robed in ermine-lined brocaded mantles, followed by pages, chamberlains, and lords-in-waiting. On the breast of the Duke, set as a brooch, glowed a ruby of extraordinary brilliance and size, taken from the treasure of Gian Galeazzo.

As for Beatrice, she had of late greatly declined in beauty; her unformed still girlish expression and manner had a strange pathos, contrasted with the state of her health and evident sufferings.

The Duke gave the signal, the seneschal raised his staff, the music struck up, and the guests took their allotted seats at the splendid banquet.

V

And now a commotion arose. The ambassador of the Grand Duke of Muscovy, Danilo Mamiroff, refused to sit below the envoy of the most serene

Republic of St. Mark. To all explanations, persuasions, and entreaties the old man was obstinate, and only repeated:

"I will not sit down. I will not sit down. 'T is an affront!" Nor recked he of curious looks and ironical smiles turned on him from every side.

"What's the matter? More trouble with the Muscovites? Good Lord, what barbarians they show themselves! They always expect the best places, and won't listen to reason. They are for ever in the way. Mere savages! And such a language! They might as well be Turks! A nation of wild beasts!"

Messer Boccalino, the interpreter, a Mantuan of great resource, hurried to the ambassador:

"But Messer Daniele, Messer Daniele!" he cried in broken Russian, bowing low, and making gestures of perfect servility, "Messer Daniele, you really must sit! 'T is a mere Milanese custom. Sit down, I beseech you, or His Highness will be offended."

Nikita Karachiarov, Mamiroff's young secretary, had come likewise to the old man.

"Danilo Kusmitch, little father, do not, I pray you, be wroth. No one can keep his own rule in a strange monastery! What would you have? These foreigners are ignorant of our usages. Pray you beware lest they take you by the arms and exclude you from the banquet. Think what a figure we should cut!"

"Nikita, hold your tongue. 'T is not for you

to teach a man of my years. I know very well what I am about. I am not going to give in. I will never sit below that man from Venice. I represent my sovereign: and my sovereign is the Autocrat of all the Russias. . . ."

"Messer Daniele! Messer Daniele!" stammered Boccalino.

"Leave me alone, you monkey-face. What are you squeaking about? Get away. I have said I will not sit down, and sit down I will not!"

The old man's small eyes, gleaming like those of a bear under his frowning brows, flashed fires of pride, fury, and indomitable obstinacy. His emerald-studded staff trembled in the tight grasp of his nervous fingers. It was clear that he was not to be subdued by any human force. The Duke summoned the Venetian envoy, and, with that happy courtesy which was his characteristic, he begged as a personal favour to himself that the Italian guest would consent to the change in his seat. He added that no one attached the slightest importance to the childish arrogance of these utter barbarians. Yet in point of fact Ludovico greatly prized the favour of the Grand Duke of Muscovy; he reckoned on his countenance to conclude an advantageous treaty with the Sultan. The Venetian looked at Mamiroff, contemptuously shrugged his shoulders, remarked that His Excellency spoke well, and quarrels over precedence were unworthy of educated persons; then calmly seated himself in the chair allotted.

Danilo Kusmitch had not understood the conversation, nor would it have altered his sense of his own importance. Unconcerned at the fire of hostile eyes, complacently stroking his beard and adjusting the sash and the sable-trimmed satin pelisse upon his corpulent person, Danilo seated himself heavily and majestically upon the chair he had conquered; while Nikita and Boccalino retired to the lower table, and sat beside Leonardo da Vinci.

The boastful Mantuan told tales, half fact, half fiction, of the wonders he had seen in Muscovy; but Leonardo, desiring more dependable information about the far-off land which, like all things vast and mysterious, excited his immediate interest, addressed himself to Karachiarov, asking questions about its boundless plains, its immense rivers and forests, the flood-tide in its Hyperborean ocean and its Hyrcanian sea, the sunlit northern nights; finally about certain of his friends who had gone thither—Pietro Solari, who was engaged in the building of the Granite Palace in Moscow, and Fioravanti of Bologna, who was putting up certain fine edifices in the square of the Kremlin.

"Messere," said the lovely Madonna Ermellina to the interpreter at her side, "I have heard that astonishing country of which you speak called 'Rossia' because of its wondrous abounding in roses. Pray you, is this to be credited?"

Boccalino laughed, and assured her that in

"Rossia" there was, on the contrary, sad lack of the queen of flowers, on account of the intolerable cold; and he told the following tale:

"Certain Florentine merchants once went to Poland, but were not allowed further into 'Rossia' because of the state of war between Poland and the Grand Duke of Muscovy. The Florentines, desirous of buying sables, invited Russian merchants to the bank of the Borysthenes, which flowed between the two countries; and bargaining began across the river, each party shouting their loudest. But so great was the cold that the words froze in the air and reached not the opposite bank. Certain ingenious peasants then made a huge fire on the midmost point of the ice-bound river; and presently, lo! the words which had remained a whole hour in mid-river air unable to move, began to thaw and to drip, gurgling and clattering like the droppings in the melting time of spring; and at last they were distinctly heard on the far shore by the Florentines, notwithstanding the fact that the Muscovites who had uttered them had long since left the opposite bank."

After listening to this anecdote, the ladies looked with great compassion at Nikita, the inhabitant of so unpleasing a country. Nikita, however, did not respond to their glances, for his attention had been arrested by a wondrous dish just served; a naked Andromeda, made of the breasts of capons, bound to a rock of cream-cheese,

and about to be loosed by a winged Perseus of veal.

The meat courses had all been served on plates of gold, but the fish was eaten off silver, as more appropriate to the watery element; silvered bread and silvered lemons were handed round, and then among oysters, lampreys, and trout appeared Amphitrite herself, made of the white flesh of eels, riding in a mother-o'-pearl chariot drawn by dolphins over an ocean of quivering blue jelly.

After this came the sweets, marchpane, pistachios, cedar-cones, almonds, and burnt sugar, edifices designed by Bramante and Leonardo—Hercules in the garden of the Hesperides, Hippolytus and Phædra, Bacchus and Ariadne, Danae and Zeus—a whole Olympus of resuscitated gods.

Nikita stared with childish enjoyment, but Danilo was so much shocked that he lost his appetite, and growled between his teeth:

"Antichristian abominations! Horrible paganism! Horrible!"

VI

Dancing began; slow and stately measures known as "Venus and Zephyr," "Cruel Destiny," "Cupid," etc.; the dresses of the ladies, being long and heavy, did not admit of rapid motion. The music was tender and soft, full of passionate languor like the sonnets of Petrarch, and to it moved dames and cavaliers, meeting and parting

with bows, sighs, and smiles, all the perfection of dignity and grace.

Messer Galeazzo Sanseverino, the young commandant of Il Moro's guards, was the cynosure of the ladies' eyes; he was attired in white, with open-work sleeves upon a pink lining; his white shoes had diamond buckles, and his face was handsome, but fatigued, dissipated, and effeminate. An approving murmur ran through the crowd when in the dance, "*Sorte crudele,*" he dropped (of course accidentally), first his shoe, and then his mantle, but continued gliding and circling with that air of saddened negligence which was considered the mark of breeding. Danilo Mamiroff watched him in astonishment, spat contemptuously, and exclaimed:

"Good Lord, what a fool!"

The Duchess was not dancing; her heart was heavy, and only long practice enabled her to play her part of amiable hostess, to receive the New-Year's congratulations, and to respond with suitable banalities to the fine speeches of the courtiers. At times she felt unable to carry the business through; she longed to escape into some corner where she could burst into sobs.

Presently she entered a small and secluded apartment, where by a fire certain young ladies and courtiers were talking in a close ring. She asked them of what they spoke.

"Of platonic love, Your Excellency," replied one of the ladies. "Messer Antoniotto Fregoso main-

tains that a lady does no violence to her modesty by kissing a man on the lips so it be by the way of ideal love."

"And how does he prove that?" asked the Duchess absently.

Messer Antoniotto answered eagerly himself.

"With Your Grace's permission, I maintain that the lips are the gates of the soul, and when they meet in a platonic salutation the souls of the lovers rise as to their natural outlet. Plato condemns not a kiss; and Solomon, in the Song of Songs, typifying the mystical union of the soul with God, says, 'Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.' "

An old baron, a country knight, with a blunt and honest face, objected from the point of view of a husband; but the pretty lady, Fiordiligi, shrugging her graceful bare shoulders, reproved his barbarism.

"*Dio mio!* we speak of love, not of marriage! Would you profane the sacred names 'Lover' and 'Beloved' with those ignoble, rude, shameless titles, 'husband' and 'wife'?"

The baron would have answered her, but Messer Antoniotto interrupted with further descant; the Duchess, however, was tired, and moved away.

In the next saloon, verses were being recited by a noted poet from Rome, Serafino d'Aquila, surnamed the Unique; a little man very carefully washed, shaved, curled, and scented, with pink

cheeks and a languishing smile, irregular teeth, and wily eyes.

Seeing Lucrezia in the circle of ladies surrounding this servant of the Muses, Beatrice paled, but instantly recovering herself, she advanced and kissed her with her usual graciousness. Before she could speak, however, an interruption occurred in the entry of a stout and gorgeous lady, who was suffering from bleeding of the nose.

"'T is an event upon which even Messer Unico himself could scarce make love-verses," observed one of the courtiers contemptuously, for the sufferer was old and ugly.

Messer Unico, feeling his reputation at stake, sprang to his feet, passed his hand through his hair, threw back his head, and raised his eyes to heaven.

"Hush! hush!" murmured the ladies. "Messer Unico composes! If Her Excellency would move a little further she would hear better!"

Madonna Ermellina took a lute and ran her fingers over the strings; thus softly accompanied, the poet, in a voice guttural and majestic as that of a ventriloquist, declaimed his lines. They were to the effect that Love, moved by a lover to shoot at the heart of a fair one, had, owing to the bandage over his eyes, shot awry, and wounded not the heart but the nose of the unfortunate lady.

The audience applauded.

"Most beautiful! Stupendous! Unsurpassable!

What conceits! What facility! Not like our Bellincioni who melts away under the exertion of putting a sonnet together! Truly, when he raised his eyes I felt the very wind of his inspiration making me well-nigh afraid!"

One lady offered him wine, another cooling tablets of mint; another placed him in an arm-chair and fanned him. He drooped and languished and blinked his eyes like a gorged cat in the afternoon sunshine.

Then he produced another sonnet in praise of the Duchess, which told how the snow, put to shame by the whiteness of her skin, had in vengeance turned itself to ice, and caused her to slip and well-nigh to fall upon the court-yard pavement.

Then he celebrated a lady who had lost a front tooth; 't was the device of Love, who, dwelling in her mouth, required a loop-hole for the shooting of his arrows.

"But this man is a genius!" cried the ladies; "his name will go down to posterity linked with that of Dante!"

"Nay, higher than Dante's. Where in the verses of Dante will you find these subtleties of our Unique one?"

"Ladies," said the poet humbly, "methinks you go too far. Dante has his special merits. Every one has his own qualities! As for me, I would give Dante's glory for your applause."

He began another sonnet; but the Duchess had lost patience, and went away.

Returning to the main saloon, she commanded her page, Ricciardetto, a faithful lad, enamoured of her she sometimes fancied, to attend with a torch at the door of her bedchamber. Then she hurried through the long line of brilliant and crowded rooms, passed along a distant and deserted gallery, and ascended the winding stair. The immense vaulted apartment, now used as the ducal bedchamber, lay in the rectangular northern tower of the castle; she entered, took a candle, and went to a small oaken cupboard let into the thickness of the wall, in which the Duke kept important papers and his private letters. She had stolen the key from her husband, and now, nervous and agitated, fitted it to the lock. However, the attempt showed the lock to be broken, and she tore open the brass fastenings, only to find that the shelves had been emptied of their contents. Obviously Il Moro, noting the loss of his key, had transported his letters elsewhere. Beatrice stood motionless.

Snowflakes were fleeting past the window like white phantoms. The wind whistled, and howled, and moaned, and the lady shuddered as she listened, for these voices of the storm and of the night recalled to her mind a something terrible which she was never able to forget for long.

Her eye fell on the round lid of iron which covered the aperture to the Dionysius ear, the

hearing-tube which Leonardo had run from the lower chambers of the palace to the Duke's bed-chamber. She put her ear to it now and listened. Waves of sound reached her like the rolling of the sea heard in shells. She listened to the festal cries of the company, the laughter, the revels, the passionate sighing of the music, but with it mingled the whistle and roar of the storm.

Suddenly it seemed to her that, close by her side, some one murmured "Bellincioni! Bellincioni!"

She gave a cry, the colour leaving her cheeks.

"Bellincioni! Of course! Why did I never think of him before? He is the one who will tell me everything. I must go to him this minute. Only so that no one shall notice me! Yet, truly I care not if I am seen. I must *know!* I can endure this atmosphere of deceit no longer."

She remembered that Bellincioni, on the pretext of indisposition, had not come to the ball. At this hour he would be at home, and alone!

So she called Ricciardetto, who was at the door.

"Tell two runners, with a litter, to await me below at the private gate. Despatch. Only see, if you desire my favour, that the matter is not known. Hear you? It must be known to none."

He kissed her hand and set off with the message.

Beatrice threw on a sable pelisse and a mask of black velvet. A few minutes more and she was in the litter, being carried toward the Porta Ticinese, where the Court poet had his lodging.

VII

Bernardo Bellincioni called his old ruinous house "the lizard's hole." He was the recipient of many munificent gifts, but his life was irregular; he drank, and gambled away whatever he had, so that "misery," as he was accustomed to say, "followed him like a wife, unloved and faithful."

Lying on a broken couch, of which the fourth leg was replaced by a billet of wood, and the mattress thin as a griddle-cake, he was sipping his third glass of sour wine, and composing an epitaph for Madonna Cecilia's deceased lap-dog. Listening to the north wind, and making gloomy prognostications as to the sort of night he was going to spend, he watched the dying-out of the remnant of fire, and vainly tried to warm his thin legs in the moth-eaten squirrel cloak, which he had thrown over them. He had not presented himself at the Court ball (where his masque, *Paradiso*, was to be performed) for other reasons than illness; though indeed he had been ill for some while, and was so lean that, as he said, "in his body it were possible to study the anatomy of the bones, muscles, and veins of the human subject." Had he been dying he might still have dragged himself to the festival; more potent than illness was, however, jealousy; he preferred freezing in his kennel to witnessing the triumph of his rival, that interloping and pretentious humbug, Messer Unico, who had turned the heads of all the silly

women. The mere thought of Messer Unico overflowed his heart with black bile; he clenched his fist, gnashed his teeth, and jumped frantically from his bed. But the room was so cold that he returned to its inadequate shelter, coughed, shivered, and rolled angrily from side to side.

"The villains!" he grumbled; "have I not written four sonnets in the best rhyme praying for firewood, and not a stick has come. I shall certainly be reduced to burning my banisters: no one comes to visit me save Jews, and if they break their necks so much the better."

However he spared the banisters. His eye fell on the makeshift leg of his bed, and he considered which were the more dangerous, a fireless room or an insecure sleeping-place. The storm swept through the room, blowing in at the chinks and shrieking in the chimney like a witch. With desperate decision Bernardo tore away the support of his couch, chopped it up, and cast it on the hearth. The fire blazed up anew, and he sat before it on a stool, putting his blue fingers to the flame, and apostrophising the last warm friend of a lonely poet.

"A dog's life!" he muttered presently; "and of a truth I merit these castigations less than others. Was it not of my forefather, the Florentine, who lived before the House of Sforza had been heard of, that the divine poet wrote:

> "'Bellincion Berti vid' io andar cinto
> Di cuoio e d'osso'?

Good Lord, when I came to Milan this herd of creeping animals did not know a sonnet from a *strambotto*. Who is it has taught them the elegancies of the new poetry? Was it not through my facile fingers that the waters of Hippocrene enriched the Lombard plain, and even threatened an inundation? And this is my reward! To lie like a dog in a kennel! To be neglected by all because, forsooth, I am poor! A poet situated as I am, is unknown as he whose face is hidden by a mask or deformed by the smallpox."

And he recited certain lines from his epistle to Ludovico, the Duke:

"I cry for aid to every one,
But each in turn replies, 'Begone!'
Ah, wretched poet! for his pains,
Thou generous lord, what meed remains?
The very cap and bells to him denied,
Among the beasts of burden harness thou his pride!"

And he hung his bald head, smiling bitterly; on his stool by the fire, crouching, and very thin, with a long red nose, he looked like some melancholy roosting bird.

Presently a knock was heard at the house-door below; then the sleepy grumbling of the surly old woman who was the poet's sole attendant; and then steps upon the brick floor.

"What, the fiend!" wondered Bellincioni; "can it be that abominable Jew come again after his

money? The infidel hound! Can he not leave me in peace even at night?"

The staircase creaked, the door opened, and into the wretched room came a woman in a sable mantle and a black velvet mask. Astounded and staring, Bernardo sprang to his feet. The lady, without a word, was about to seat herself on a chair.

"For God's love, be careful, madam!" cried the poet, "the back is broken!" Then in the ceremonious tone of a courtier he added: "To what good genius am I indebted for the happiness of seeing an illustrious lady in my poor abode?"

"Surely," he thought, "'t is a customer come to order a madrigal! Well, it brings money, and that brings firewood! Yet the hour is strange for a lonely lady! 'T is clear my name is not unknown. And if this one, who knows how many more are my admirers?"

With reviving spirits he threw the rest of the wood on the flame, which already had begun to languish.

The fair unknown raised her mask.

"It is I, Bernardo."

In his astonishment he staggered against the doorpost.

"Jesus! Holy Virgin! Angels and martyrs!" he exclaimed. "What? Your Excellency! Most shining lady——"

"Bernardo, you can do me a great service,"

she looked round uneasily; "but can any one hear us?"

"Be at ease, madam. No one except the rats and the mice."

"Listen!" said Beatrice slowly, fixing her piercing eyes on his. "I am aware that you have composed verses for Madonna Lucrezia; doubtless you have kept the letter of commission from the Duke."

He turned pale, and observed her silently, consternation in his eyes.

"Fear nothing," she continued; "no one shall know. I shall study how to reward you, Bernardo."

"Your Excellency!" stammered the unlucky poet, whose tongue had lost its glibness, "do not believe—nay, 't is all calumny! No letters—before God, I swear there are no letters!"

Her eyes flashed, and her brows contracted in an ominous frown. She rose and drew nearer, still fixing him with her gaze.

"Lie not. I know all. As you value your life, give me the Duke's letters. Give me them! Hear you? Bernardo, be careful, my servants are at the door. Think you I have come to jest with you?"

He fell before her on his knees.

"But, most illustrious lady, I have no letters!"

"You say you have no letters?"

"None."

Fury overcame her. "Wait then, accursed

pander, till I tear the truth from your lips. Oh, I 'll wring confession from you! I 'll strangle you with my own hands, you rubbish, you rogue!" she cried; in good sooth driving her slender fingers into his throat with such force that the veins swelled on his forehead. Unresisting, rolling his eyes, and hanging his hands helplessly, he more than ever resembled a sick bird.

"She is strangling me!" thought Bellincioni; "well, it can't be helped. Not for so poor a reason will I betray my lord!"

Dissipated rascal, and venal flatterer the poetaster had always been, but never traitor. In his veins flowed better blood than that of the Sforzas, and the moment had come for showing it.

The Duchess, however, recovered herself. With a gesture of disgust she flung him from her, snatched up the little lamp with its broken sides and charred wick, and made for the adjoining cabinet, which she guessed to be the poet's working *studiolo*. Bernardo, placing himself against the door, barred the entrance. But the haughty glance of the Duchess awed him, and he withdrew. She swept past and entered the poor refuge of his threadbare muse. A smell of mould came from the books, great patches of damp showed on the plaster walls. The broken glass of the frosted windows was repaired with tow. On the sloping ink-splashed board were quills, gnawed and twisted in the agony of finding rhymes, and papers, doubtless rough copies of poems.

Heedless of the author, Beatrice stood the lamp on a shelf and began to rummage among these sheets. She found sonnets addressed to chamberlains, treasurers, and dispensers, with burlesque complaints and prayers for firewood, clothes, wine, and bread. In one he asked of Messer Pallavicini a roast goose for the due celebration of All Saints' Day. In another, headed "*Del Moro a Cecilia,*" the poet recounted how Jupiter, returning from his mistress, had been forced to brave the storm lest *jealous Juno* should guess his treachery, and tearing the diadem from her brow scatter its pearls like hailstones and raindrops from the sky.

Presently the search brought the Duchess to a dainty case of black wood; she opened it, and saw a carefully tied-up packet of letters. Bernardo, watching her, wrung his hands in dismay. The Duchess looked at him, then at the letters; read the name of Lucrezia, recognised the handwriting of her husband, and knew she had found the thing she sought, his letters—the rough draft of the love-verses he had commanded for Lucrezia. She thrust the packet into the bosom of her dress, flung a bag of ducats at the poet, as one might fling a bone to a dog, and departed.

He heard her descend the stair, heard the bang of the door, and stood motionless in the centre of the room as if thunderstruck, though the floor seemed shaking under him like the deck of a ship in storm. At last, exhausted, he flung himself on

the three-legged couch, and sank into a deathlike slumber.

VIII

The Duchess returned to the castle, where the guests had noticed her absence with surprise, and the Duke himself become alarmed. He met her in the hall, and she accosted him, her face somewhat blanched, and explained that having felt fatigued after the banquet she had gone into an inner room to snatch some repose.

"Bice!" cried the Duke, taking her hand, which was trembling and cold, "you are ill! Tell me, for pity's sake, what is the matter. Shall we put off the second part of this entertainment? Dear one, did I not arrange it solely to give pleasure to thee?"

"There is nothing the matter," replied Beatrice. "Why this anxiety, Vico? I have not felt so well this many a day. I wish to see the *Paradiso*. I intend to dance."

Il Moro was partly reassured.

"God be thanked, beloved," he said, kissing her hand.

The guests now streamed into the *Sala del giuoco alla palla*, which had been arranged for the representation of the *Paradiso*, by Leonardo da Vinci, the Court mechanician. When every one was seated, and the lights had been extinguished, it was his voice which cried "Ready!" Then a train of powder exploded, and crystalline globes,

like planets, were seen disposed in a circle, filled with water, and illumined by a myriad of living fires sparkling with rainbow colours.

"See!" said the lively Madonna Ermellina, pointing out Leonardo to her neighbour; "see that face! He is a wizard capable of carrying away the castle bodily, as one reads in the romances."

"I mislike this playing with fire," replied the other. "Heaven grant we have not a real fire presently!"

Presently, from a black chest concealed behind the fiery globes, a white-winged angel arose and recited the prologue. At the line:

"The great King makes his spheres revolve"—

he pointed to the Duke, as if indicating that he governed his people with the same wisdom shown by the monarch of heaven in turning his celestial spheres. At the same moment the crystal globes began to turn to the accompaniment of a low strange music, representing the celestial harmony told of by Pythagoras. Again the planets stood still; upon each appeared its presiding deity, and each one recited a hymn in praise of Beatrice.

Mercury said:

"Thou Nature's miracle! Diviner Sun!
Lightning, by whom the clouds are overrun!
Thou Lamp, by whom the stars are all outshone!
The pride and glory of a future race!

In that angelic figure, half concealed,
The secret of the higher world lies sealed,
And all of heaven's glory is revealed
In that fair face."

And again Venus, kneeling before the Duchess, exclaimed:

"O Jove! whose justice never errs,
And at whose voice all nature stirs
And quickens to a goodly heritage,
I bless thee for thy coming unto earth,
Since thus fair Beatrice was given birth,
Whose fruit is nurtured by the Hesperides.
My beauty at her feet in ashes lies,
Despoilèd Venus none shall recognise."

And Diana prayed that she might be given as a slave to Beatrice the beauteous, since never had a star like her shone in the heavenly firmament. Then came the epilogue, in which Jove presented to Beatrice the three Hellenic graces and the seven Christian virtues; and the whole Olympus and Paradise, under the shadow of the radiant angelic plumes, and of a cross gleaming with green lamps, symbols of hope, once more began to revolve, while gods and goddesses sang hymns in praise of Beatrice, accompanied by the music of the spheres and by the acclamations of the spectators.

"And why," asked the Duchess of Messer Gaspare Visconti, who sat at her side; "why is there here no jealous Juno to tear the diadem

from her brow, and to rain pearls upon the earth in the form of hailstones and raindrops?"

On hearing these words Il Moro turned quickly and looked at her. She laughed a laugh so wild and forced that the Duke felt ice fall round his heart; but immediately Beatrice composed herself, and turned the conversation. Only she pressed the incriminating letters more closely to her bosom, intoxicated by the hope of revenge, strong, calm, almost gay, in her mood of triumph.

The masque ended, the guests passed into another hall where a new spectacle awaited them. The triumphant chariots of Numa Pompilius, Cæsar, Augustus, and Trajan crossed the stage, drawn by negroes, leopards, griffons, centaurs, dragons, and adorned with allegorical pictures and inscriptions, which set forth that all these heroes were but precursors of Ludovico of Milan. Then a chariot came alone, drawn by unicorns, and, bearing an immense globe representing the earth, upon which was stretched a warrior in a cuirass of rusty iron; a naked and gilded child, holding a branch of mulberry (*moro*) in his hand, issued from a cleft in the cuirass, to signify the death of the Age of Iron and the birth of the Age of Gold under the sage rule of Ludovico. To the delight of the spectators the Golden Age proved to be a living child; he was, however, in great discomfort from the plaster of gold which covered his little body, and tears shone in his frightened eyes. In a tremulous and miserable voice he whined

a *canzonetta*, praising the Duke, with the monotonous and lugubrious refrain:

"Tornerà l'età dell' oro,
Cantiam tutti: 'Viva il Moro!'"

(The age of gold shall brighten as of yore,
And all exulting sing, "Long live the Moor.")

Around the chariot of the Golden Age the dancing was renewed, and though no one heeded him any longer, the unhappy golden child still sobbed out his piteous song:

"Tornerà l' età dell' oro,
Cantiam tutti: 'Viva il Moro!'"

Beatrice was dancing with Gaspare Visconti. At times she laughed and sobbed hysterically, and her throat convulsively contracted. With unsupportable agony the blood throbbed at her temples, and a mist rolled before her eyes; yet her face was calm, and she even smiled.

At the dance's conclusion she again slipped unnoticed from the revelling crowd, and sought seclusion in her private apartments.

IX

She went to the retired *Torre della Tesoreria*, where no one ever came save the Duke and herself. Taking the candle from Ricciardetto and bidding him await her at the entrance, she passed into a

lofty hall, dark and cold as a cellar, sat down, drew forth the packet of letters and was about to read. But suddenly a strange and eerie gust of wind swept shrieking round the tower, howled in the chimney, invaded the room with an icy breath almost extinguishing the candle. There was a great hush; it seemed to her she could hear the distant music of the ball, the murmur of voices, the patter of dancing feet, the sound of iron fetters from the vaults below, where was the prison.

And at the same moment she felt a presence in the room with her: there, in the dark angle of the wall, with eyes fixed upon hers. An anguish of terror seized her soul. She felt she must not move, must not look. But it was unendurable, and she did look. He stood there, as once she had seen him before, a long, long, black figure, blacker than the investing darkness, his head bent, and shrouded in the cowl of a monk. She tried to scream, to call Ricciardetto, but her voice failed. She rose to flee and her legs refused to support her; she fell on her knees groaning:

"Thou? Again? And wherefore?"

He raised his head slowly and threw back the cowl, and showed the visage of Gian Galeazzo Sforza, *the murdered Duke*. The face had nothing in it corpse-like, nothing appalling, and he spoke gently and distinctly:

"Poor thing! Poor woman! Pardon me!"

He made a step towards her, and she felt a

freezing and unearthly cold. She shrieked, and fell unconscious to the earth.

Ricciardetto heard the cry and ran to her succour. When he saw his beloved mistress stretched senseless, he too shrieked, rushed away along the dark galleries, where at long intervals sentries stood holding dim lanterns, then into the crowded guest-chambers seeking the Duke, and crying wildly:

"Help! Help!"

It was midnight, and the revelry was at its height. The modish dance called "*Fedeli Amanti*" had just begun. In it lady and cavalier must pass under an arch upon which stood the Genius of Love blowing a trumpet; at its foot were judges; and when true lovers approached, the Genius greeted them with tender strains, and the judges smiled and applauded and let them pass; but the untrue were hindered, and the trumpet stunned them with terrible noise, the judges pelted them with hail of *confetti*, and the luckless couple, loudly bemocked, were forced to turn and flee.

The Duke, to sweetest strains like the cooing of doves, had just made his passage of the arch, when, the crowd parting in dismay to admit his approach, Ricciardetto hurled himself at his master, still shrieking his wild "Help! Help!"

Ludòvico laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"What is it? What has happened?"

"The Duchess! She is dying! Help!"

"The Duchess is ill? Where? Speak, in the name of God!" cried the Duke.

"In the *Torre della Tesoreria.*"

The Duke rushed from the hall, his golden chain rattling, his hair flying.

The Genius of the arch of true lovers went on blowing his trumpet, but now the dancers left him and he stopped. Some had followed the Duke—in a moment the whole brilliant throng had scattered like a flock of frightened sheep. The arch was overthrown and trampled, the trumpeter nearly fell, was hustled, and sprained his ankle.

Some cried "Fire!"

"I said it was madness to play with fire," wailed the lady who had disapproved Leonardo's rotating planets; and others fainted.

"Calm yourselves, ladies. There is no fire!" said the seneschal.

"Then what is it?"

"The Duchess is indisposed."

"Nay, she is dying! She has been poisoned!"

"Impossible! Her Grace was here but now. She was dancing!"

"But don't you see? Isabella of Aragon, to avenge her lord, has with slow poison——"

"Oh Dio! Dio!"

But in the next saloon the music continued, for there nothing was known of the disturbance. The dance "Venus and Zephyr" was in progress, the smiling ladies leading their cavaliers by golden

chains, and when these fell on their knees with lamentable sighs, placing their feet upon their necks. But a chamberlain now entered, waving his hand to the musicians.

"Silence! The Duchess is ill!"

There was an instant hush, save for one viol played by a deaf and purblind old man, which long continued to pour forth its plaintive quiverings.

The servants passed through the hall carrying a bed, long and narrow, with hard stuffing, and bars at sides and ends, kept from time immemorial in the wardrobes of the palace, and *de rigueur* for the birth of the princes of Milan. Strange and ill-omened seemed this portentous couch in the midst of the festivity, the lights, the crowds of gorgeous ladies. They looked from one to the others mysteriously.

"'T is from a fall or, mayhap, a fright," said one of mature age. "She should have swallowed at once the white of an egg in which were lengths of scarlet silk, cut small."

From the upper room, meantime (Ricciardetto being stationed in the adjoining closet), came such a terrible cry, that the page seized the arm of one of the women who were passing with warming-pans, baskets of linen, and so forth, and cried in an agony:

"For God's sake, tell me what is the matter!"

She did not answer, and another, clearly the midwife, ordered him away.

"'T is no place for boys," she said sternly.

Yet the door was left ajar for a moment, and looking into the disordered room he saw the suffering face of her whom he loved with his hopeless boy's love, her lips parted in a continuous groan.

He turned pale, and hid his face in his hands.

Beside him chattered a group of gossips each with her infallible recipe: snake's skin, a bath in a heated cauldron, decoctions of cochineal and of stag's antlers, the tying of her husband's *berretta* round the neck of the patient, and so forth.

The Duke entered hurriedly and sank upon a chair, clutching his head with his hands and weeping distractedly.

"Lord God! What torture!" he murmured. "I cannot support it! I cannot! Ah Bice! Bice! And 't is all my doing! mine!" Still echoed in his ears the furious cry with which she had greeted his approach.

"Go away! Go away! Go to your Lucrezia!"

One of the busybodies brought him a pewter plate piled with meat.

"Your Excellency will be pleased to eat it."

"Good Lord, what are you giving me?"

"Wolf's flesh. 'T is of great benefit to the wife in her labour, if the husband will eat the flesh of wolves."

The Duke, submissive and self-denying, did his best to swallow the repulsive black substance,

which was so hard as to stick in his throat, and the old woman gabbled as she bent over him:

"Our Father which art in Heaven,
Seven wolves and the mate of one,
Blow the wind from us this even,
Praise Thy name, the storm is done!
Holy, Holy, Holy, in the name of the Trinity, one and eternal.
Let the word stand for ever! Amen."

She was interrupted by Messer Luigi Marliani, the first of the Court physicians, who came from the sick-room, followed by his colleagues.

"Well? well?" asked Ludovico.

There was a silence; then Messer Luigi spoke:

"Your Excellency, we have done all that is possible. Now we must put our hope in the clemency of the Lord."

"No! No!" cried the Duke, seizing his hand. "There must be some means! It is unendurable! Try something!"

The physicians exchanged glances like augurs, hoping thus to reassure him. Then Marliani, knitting his brows, said in Latin to the young doctor beside him:

"Three ounces of river snails, with nutmeg and red coral."

"A bleeding, perhaps?" suggested another, an old man, with a gentle and diffident face.

"I had thought of it," said Marliani; "but Mars is in Cancer and in the fourth house of the

sun. And, further, to-day's date is an uneven number."

The old man sighed, shook his head and forbore to urge his point. Various other loathsome medicaments were proposed, till the Duke could no longer contain himself. He turned furiously to the doctors.

"To the devil with all your science!" he exclaimed; "she is dying, do you hear me? She is dying! and you have nothing better to propose than three ounces of snails and a plaster of cow's dung! Rascals, charlatans, fools! I will hang every one of you!"

He paced the room a prey to mortal anguish, listening to the sufferer's unceasing groans. Suddenly his eye fell on Leonardo and he drew him aside.

"Listen," he cried wildly, "Leonardo, you are master of great secrets. No, no, deny it not, I *know*. Ah, my God! my God!—that cry! What was I saying? Yes, yes! Help me, Leonardo! Do something! I would give my soul to succour her—even for a short space—only to still that cry!"

Leonardo would have replied; but the Duke, forgetting that he had appealed to him, hurried to meet the chaplain and two monks entering at that moment:

"At last! God be praised! What have you brought? Ah! a particle of the remains of St. Ambrose, the belt of St. Margaret—is she not

the patroness of women in childbed?—and a hair of the Blessed Virgin! Ah, how I thank you! And surely your prayers——"

Following the monks he was entering the sick-chamber when the continual low groaning suddenly gave place to shrieks so appalling that, stopping his ears, he turned and fled, passing through the dark galleries like one possessed. He hurried to the chapel and cast himself on his knees before the most revered picture.

"Holy Mother of God!" he implored with clasped hands and streaming eyes, "I have sinned —I have sinned horribly—I have slain an innocent youth—my lawful sovereign! O thou merciful Mediatress, have mercy upon me! Take my life—take my soul; but in pity, O Holy Mother, save Beatrice!"

Shreds of thoughts and senseless fancies crowded in his brain and stole his attention from his prayers. He remembered a story of a drowning sailor who had thought to buy salvation by the promise of a candle as big as the mast of a ship; and when asked how the wax for this colossus was to be provided, had answered: "Hold your tongue; our present task is to get saved, and afterwards we 'll get the Virgin to be content with a smaller candle."

"Oh God, where are my thoughts!" cried the Duke bethinking himself. "I must be going mad! God help me!" And he fell a-praying with renewed fervour; but now visions of Leonardo's

crystal globes tormented him, and the tiresome chant of the gilded boy:

"Tornerà l' età dell' oro,
Cantiam tutti: 'Viva il Moro!'"

Then all vanished, and he sank in a profound slumber. When he awoke he fancied but two or three minutes had elapsed. He left the chapel, and saw through the frosted window-pane the grey light of the winter's dawn.

X

Il Moro returned to the *Sala della Rocchetta* where reigned a mournful silence. A woman passing with a basket of swaddling clothes approached him and said:

"Her Excellency has been delivered."

"Does she live?" he stammered, very pale.

"Yes, she lives; but the infant is still-born. She is very weak; and she desires to speak with Your Highness."

He went to her room; and there on the pillows he saw a small shrunken face like a child's, pallid and calm, with great eyes surrounded by livid circles, and turbid as if a spider's web were drawn over them; familiar and yet strange. He bent over her silently.

"Send for Isabella! Quickly!" she gasped.

He gave the order; and presently the tall, young, graceful woman with the proud sad look,

the widow of Gian Galeazzo, entered the room and approachced the dying Beatrice. All retired except Ludovico and the confessor.

For a few minutes the two women whispered together. Then Isabella kissed the other's cold forehead, knelt by the bedside and prayed, covering her face with her hands.

Beatrice signed to her husband.

"Vico, forgive me! Weep not. Remember my spirit will be always with you. I know it was I only—I only whom——"

She could not complete the sentence, but he understood her meaning.

"It was I only whom you loved." Slowly she turned her eyes to him, eyes already darkening, and murmured:

"One kiss—on my lips. . . ."

The monk was reciting the last prayers for the dying, and the attendants, who had re-entered, responded in chorus.

The Duke felt the lips beneath his own turn cold and stiff; in that long kiss she had breathed her last faint sigh.

"She is dead," said Marliani.

All knelt, making the sign of the cross. Il Moro raised himself very slowly, his face rigid, expressive less of grief than of extreme tension of spirit; he breathed heavily and loud like one toiling up the steep hillside. Suddenly he stretched out his arms, gave one loud cry:

"Bice!" and fell senseless upon the corpse.

Of the spectators Leonardo alone had remained calm; his clear searching eyes were fixed upon the Duke. The look of supreme suffering in a human face, or its expression in the gestures of the body, was to his eyes a rare and beautiful manifestation of nature, an exceptional experience. Not a wrinkle, not the quivering of a muscle escaped his passionless all-seeing eyes. Presently, over-mastered by the desire to draw, he slipped from the room to fetch his sketch-book.

In the lower halls, whither the artist bent his steps, the candles were dying out in black smoke and gutterings of wax. The chariots of Numa and Augustus, and all the pompous allegorical paraphernalia employed to glorify Il Moro and his Beatrice, were unspeakably melancholy and wretched in the morning brilliance. In one room he saw the overthrown and trampled *Arco dell' Amore.*

Standing by the moribund fire he was beginning his sketch, when in the chimney-corner he noticed the boy who had personified the Golden Age. He had fallen asleep, huddled up, his hands clutching his knees, his head dropped upon them. The faint heat from the dying embers had not sufficed to warm the poor little naked and gilded body. Leonardo touched him on the shoulder, but the child did not look up. He moaned piteously and the artist took him in his arms. Then he opened frightened eyes, blue as violets, and wailed:

"Let me go home! Let me go home!"

"What is your name?" asked Leonardo.

"Lippi. Let me go home! Let me go home! I am so cold. I feel so sick."

His eyelids fell heavily, and he babbled deliriously:

> "Tornerà l' età dell' oro,
> Cantiam tutti: 'Viva il Moro!'"

Leonardo wrapped the boy in his own cloak, laid him in a chair, and roused the servants in the antechamber who were sleeping off the effects of their cups. He learned from them about the child: that he was motherless, the son of a tinker in the *Broletto Novo*, who, for twenty scudi, had sold his child to the mumming, though warned that he might die of being gilded. Leonardo returned, wrapped the boy snugly in his furs, and was carrying him out of the palace to the nearest drug shop that the paint might be removed from his skin. Suddenly, however, he paused, for he remembered the drawing he had just commenced, and the interesting look of despair in Ludovico's face.

"Ah, well," he thought, "I shall scarce forget it. The chief thing is the wrinkle over the arched eyebrows, and the strange smile which one might think full of serenity, even of enthusiasm. The expression of immense grief is like enough to that of immoderate joy; and truly Plato has said

that the two emotions, rising upon different bases, converge at their apex."

Then feeling the tremble of the frozen child, he added to himself ironically:

"Poor little sick bird—our Age of Gold!"

And he pressed him with such tenderness to his heart that the little lad fancied his mother had risen from her grave and was comforting him.

XI

Beatrice Sforza d'Este died on Tuesday, the 2nd of January, 1497, at six in the morning. The Duke remained by her corpse for twenty-four hours, refusing food and sleep. It was feared his reason would give way. On Thursday morning he called for writing materials and wrote to Isabella d'Este, sister of the dead Duchess, a long letter breathing bitterest grief.

"It had been easier for me to have died myself," he wrote: "I pray you send me no condolence nor messenger."

After writing he was induced to eat a little, not presenting himself at table but being served in solitude by Ricciardetto.

He had proposed to leave the disposing of the funeral to Bartolomeo Calco, his secretary; arranging himself merely the order of the procession. But his interest became aroused, and presently he was planning details of the ceremonial

with the same zeal he had shown in ordering the magnificent festival of the Golden Age. He fixed the precise weight of the funeral tapers; the number of *braccia* of gold brocade and of black cramoisie for the altar cloths: the largess of small coin, pease, and tallow to be distributed among the poor in the name of the deceased. Choosing the cloth for the mourning of the Court functionaries, he did not omit to feel its weight with his fingers, and to make sure of its quality by holding it to the light. For himself he ordered a special mourning garb (*abito solenne di lutto profondo*) having holes torn in it to simulate the rendings of despairing frenzy.

A few days later Il Moro caused the tomb of the still-born child to be inscribed with a pompous epitaph composed by himself, and translated into Latin by Merula:

"I, unhappy child, have perished before I have seen the light; more unhappy in that, dying, I have ravished life from my mother—from my father his consort. In this adverse fate but one consolation remains to me: that I was born of parents equal unto gods. In the year 1497, the third of the Nones of January."

Il Moro stood a long time contemplating this inscription, cut in gold letters upon a slab of black marble covering the infant's grave. It was in the monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie, where Beatrice also slept her last sleep.

Ludovico Sforza il Moro (Boltraffio, Milan).

Photo by Anderson.

The Duke shared the naïve enthusiasm of the stone-mason, who having finished his work drew back and admired it from a distance, putting his head on one side, closing one eye, clucking his tongue, and murmuring in an ecstasy of satisfaction:

"This is no tomb, but a jewel."

One morning when the snow on the house-tops shone white against the rich blue of the sky, and in the crystal air was that freshness like the fragrance of lilies which seems to be the perfume of snow, Leonardo da Vinci passed from the sunlit frost into a dark close chamber hung with black taffeta, where the shutters were rigorously closed, and funeral tapers were still alight—the chamber of Ludovico, who for many days had refused to leave it.

The Duke spoke of the *Cenacolo* which was to glorify the place where Beatrice was laid. Then he said:

"Leonardo, they tell me you have taken under your wing that urchin who played the Golden Age at our ill-omened feast. What of him?"

"He is dead, Most Illustrious. He died on the day of Her Grace's funeral."

"Died!" echoed the Duke. "Nay, but that is strange!" And he dropped his head on his hands, sighing heavily. Then he stretched his hand to Leonardo.

"Yes! yes!" he cried; " 't was destined to fall out thus. Truly our Golden Age is dead;

dead together with my incomparable one, for it could not, it should not, survive her. Is it not a truth, *amico mio*, that here we have a strange coincidence—theme for a tremendous allegory?"

XII

The whole year was passed in the deepest mourning. The Duke did not lay aside his garment of woe, nor did he present himself at table, but ate off a tray held before him by courtiers.

"Since his lady's death," wrote the Venetian Ambassador, Marin Sanuto, "Il Moro has become very devout, is present at all church ceremonies, fasts, and lives continently (so at least they say), and has in his plans the fear of God constantly before his eyes."

In the daytime the Duke was able to forget his bereavement in the affairs of state, though even here he felt the lack of Beatrice; during the night the intensity of his grief redoubled. Often in dreams he saw her as she had been when he had married her: sixteen, childish and wilful, slim, dark; almost like a boy; so untamed that sometimes she hid herself in cupboards to avoid assisting at state ceremonials, and for three months after their marriage defended herself with her teeth and her nails from her husband's caresses. One night, five days before the first anniversary of her death, he dreamed of her as she had been one day long ago when there had been

a fishing party on the banks of the lake in her favourite country house of Cusnago. Fish had been plentiful, and the buckets were filled to the brim. Having turned up her sleeves, the young Duchess had amused herself throwing the creatures by handfuls back into the water, laughing and delighting in the joy of the released captives, in the flash of their scales as they plunged deep into the clear water. The perch, the roach, the bream wriggled in her bare hands, then catching the sun they glowed like brilliants; and the smooth olive cheek of the beautiful girl glowed too. Upon awaking, Ludovico found his pillow wet with tears. He rose and went to the Convent delle Grazie, and prayed long at his wife's tomb; then he dined with the prior and disputed with him upon the burning theological question of the hour, the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. When it grew dark, Il Moro left the monastery, and went straight to the dwelling of Madonna Lucrezia.

His grief for his wife, his fear of God, in no wise militated against love for his mistresses. On the contrary, he clung to them more closely than before; the more so that of late the Countess Cecilia and Madonna Lucrezia had become bosom friends. Cecilia, though a blue-stocking or *dotta eroina*, as it was then called, and famed as the "new Sappho," was at bottom a simple good-hearted creature, somewhat easily run away with by enthusiasms. Upon the death of the

Duchess she found opportunity for one of those exploits of love of which she had read in romances: she would make common cause with Lucrezia, her young rival, that together they might comfort the Duke! At first Lucrezia was jealous and hard to win, but the magnanimity of the *dotta eroina* finally disarmed her, and she opened her heart to this anomaly in female friendship.

In the summer Lucrezia bore a son; the Countess desired to be his godmother, and though herself the mother of children by the Duke, lavished on the infant extravagant tenderness and called herself his grandam. Thus Il Moro's prophetic dream had been realised, and his mistresses were friends. To celebrate the auspicious arrangement, he caused Bellincioni to write a sonnet in which Lucrezia and Cecilia were figured as the Morning and the Evening Glow; while he, disconsolate widower, stood between them.

This evening, entering the familiar luxurious chamber of the Palazzo Crivelli, he found the ladies side by side before the fire. Of course, like the rest of the Court, they were dressed in the deepest mourning.

"How is Your Excellency in his health?" asked the Evening Glow. She was quite unlike her rival, but no less attractive, with her white skin, flame-coloured hair, and hazel eyes clear as the water in a mountain tarn.

The Duke had complained of ill health lately, and though this evening he felt rather better

than usual, languidly answered, from force of habit:

"Ah, madam, you can easily conceive to what condition I am reduced. My mind is occupied but with one subject, how soonest I may be laid to rest beside my dove."

"Nay, nay, Your Excellency must not speak so!" said Cecilia, with deprecating hands. "Think if Madonna Beatrice could hear you! All sorrow comes from God, and must be accepted even with thankfulness."

"You speak well," replied Il Moro, "I would not murmur. Nay, then, God forbid! Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

And he raised his eyes to heaven, pressing closely the hands of the two ladies.

"May the Lord reward you, my dear ones, that you have not abandoned the poor widowed one!"

He wiped his eyes, and then drew two papers from the pocket of his mourning attire. One was a deed of gift by which he gave the rich lands of the Villa Sforzesca to the Monastery delle Grazie.

"But," said the Countess, astonished, "I had thought Your Highness adored this villa."

"My love for terrestrial things is dead. And, madam, what need has one man with lands so large?"

Cecilia laid her rosy fingers on his lips with sympathetic reproach. Then she asked curiously:

"And this other paper, what is it?"

At this his face cleared, and the old, gay, somewhat cunning smile appeared on his lips.

He read the second document aloud, also a deed of gift, with recital of the lands, woods, hamlets, hunting rights, and other advantages which he, Ludovico, Duke of Milan, was conferring on Madonna Lucrezia Crivelli and his natural son Giampaolo. With the rest was included the villa of Cusnago, Beatrice's favourite country house, renowned for its fisheries.

The last words of the document Ludovico read in trembling tones:

"In the wondrous and rare bonds of great love, this lady has showed unto us entire devotion and displayed such loftiness of sentiment that often in our intercourse with her we have experienced an entrancing and exceptional delight, added to great lightening of our cares."

Cecilia clapped her hands and fell on her friend's neck, her eyes wet with maternal tenderness.

"Did I not tell you, my sweet sister, that he had a heart of gold? Now my little grandson, Giampaolo, has the richest inheritance in Milan."

"What date have we?" asked Il Moro.

" 'T is the 28th of December," replied Cecilia.

"The 28th!" he echoed pensively.

It was the day, the hour, when a year ago Beatrice had surprised her husband with his mistress. The room was unchanged: the same winter wind howled in the chimney, the bright fire burned

on the hearth, and above it danced the chain of naked cupids or cherubs. On the round table with the green covering stood the same crystal goblet of *Balnea aponitana;* the same mandoline, the same sheets of music littered the floor. The doors opened into the bedroom, and there was the wardrobe in which he had taken refuge.

What would he not give, so he thought, if he might at this moment hear the rap of the knocker on the great door, if the frightened maid should run in with the cry, "Madonna Beatrice!" Yes, he would gladly once again tremble in the wardrobe like a caught thief, hearing in the distance the indignant voice of the lady of his love. Alas! it could not be, that time had gone by for ever! His head sank and tears filled his eyes.

"Oh, *Santo Iddio!*" said Cecilia, turning to her friend, "he weeps anew. Rouse yourself! Coax, comfort him! Console him! How can you be so cold?"

And gently she pushed her rival into the Duke's arms.

Lucrezia had long felt sickened by this unnatural friendship. She would have liked to get up and go away; nevertheless she took the Duke's hand. He smiled at her through his tears and laid it upon his heart.

Cecilia took the mandoline, and, assuming the pose in which twelve years ago Leonardo had painted her, sang one of Petrarch's lyrics for Laura:

"Levommi il mio pensiero in parte ov' era
Quella ch' io cerco e non ritrovo in terra."

The Duke, much moved, wiped his eyes, and, stretching out his hands as to a dissolving vision, he repeated the last line:

"E compie' mia giornata innanzi sera."

"Ah, yes, my dove, thou didst indeed finish thy day before the evening! . . . Ladies, sometimes it seems to me as if she smiled upon us three from heaven. Ah, Bice, Bice, *mia adorata!*"

He drew Lucrezia to him, and presently Cecilia rose and left them together. The "Evening Glow" was not jealous of the "Dawn"; from long experience she knew that soon again her turn would come. Her mandoline sounded from the next room.

And above the merry firelight, the naked cupids of Caradosso's moulding prolonged their eternal dance, laughing madly around the nails, the lance, the crown of thorns.

Beatrice d'Este (Luini, Milan).

Photo by Anderson.

BOOK IX

THE SIMILITUDES—1498–1499

"I sensi sono terrestri, la ragione sta fuor di quelli, quando contempla."—LEONARDO DA VINCI.

(The Senses belong to earth: Reason, when she contemplates, stands outside them.)

"Οὐρανὸς ἄνω οὐρανὸς κάτω."

(Heaven above—heaven below.)

TABULA SMARAGDINA.

I

"SEE here! On the map of the Indian Ocean, westward of the island of Taprobane, we find a note—'The Sirens: prodigies of the sea.' Christopher Columbus told me that having come there and found no sirens, he was greatly astonished. But you smile. Why?"

"Oh, nothing! Go on, Guido; I am listening."

"I know very well, Messer Leonardo, that you don't believe in sirens! Well, and what would you say of the skiapodes, who use their feet as parasols; or the pygmies, whose ears are so large that they make one a bolster, the other a blanket; or of the tree which bears eggs for its fruit, from which come yellow downy chickens, so fishy-fla-

voured they may be eaten on fast-days; or of that marine monster upon which certain mariners, believing it an island, disembarked and lighted a fire for the cooking of their supper? This last is a very true tale, related by an aged mariner from Lisbon, a man in nowise given to wine, and who swore and swore again by the blood and the body of Christ, that he spoke what was true."

This conversation took place six years after the discovery of the New World, on Palm Sunday, at Florence, in a room above the storehouse of Messer Pompeo Berardi, a shipbuilder, who had a branch establishment at Seville, and superintended there the building of ships for sailing to the New Continent. Messer Guido Berardi, Pompeo's nephew, was an impassioned seaman; he had prepared to take part in Vasco di Gama's expedition, when he was stricken by the terrible disease called French by the Italians, and Italian by the French; German by the Poles, Polish by the Muscovites, Christian by the Turks. In vain he had consulted all physicians, in vain he had made waxen offerings at every wonder-working shrine; paralysed, condemned to eternal immobility, he preserved an extraordinary activity of mind, and by listening to sailors' stories, and sitting up all night over books and maps, he sailed the oceans of imagination, and made discoveries by proxy. His room, which sextants, compasses, astrolabes, made like a ship's cabin, opened on to a balcony, a Florentine loggia. The clear sky

of a spring evening was already darkening; the flame of the lamp flickered in the wind; from the store-house below were wafted odours of spices—cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, and cloves.

"And so, Messer Leonardo," he concluded, rubbing his unhappy legs under their coverlet, "'t is not meaningless the saying that faith removes mountains. Had Columbus doubted like you, he had accomplished naught. Confess, I pray you, is it not worth grey hair at thirty to have found the Earthly Paradise?"

"Paradise?" said Leonardo; "nay, how is that?"

"What? Have you not heard? Know you not that by observations on the Pole Star, taken by Messer Cristoforo near the Azores, he has proved that the world has not the shape of an apple, as is commonly supposed. 'T is a pear, with a protuberance like the nipple of a woman's breast. On this nipple, a mountain so high that its summit leans against the lunar sphere, lies the Earthly Paradise."

"But, *caro* Guido, science . . . ."

"Science!" cried the other contemptuously. "Know you, Messere, what Columbus says of science? I will quote you his words in his *Libro de las Profecias*. He says: 'Not mathematics, nor the charts of geographers, nor the arguments of reason, helped me to my deed, but solely the prophecy of Isaiah touching a new heaven and a new earth.' "

Here Guido fell silent, for at this hour began

the nightly racking of his joints. He was carried to his bed; and Leonardo, left alone, entertained himself verifying those observations upon the Pole Star which had led to so singular a delusion; and, in truth, he found errors so gross that he could not believe his eyes.

"What ignorance!" he said to himself more than once; "it would seem he has discovered the New World by chance, groping at random. He himself sees no more than a blind man, nor doth he know what it is he has discovered; he thinks it is China or Solomon's Ophir; or, by my faith, the Earthly Paradise! Death will overtake him before he has learned the truth."

He read the first letter, dated April 29th, 1493, in which Columbus informed Europe of his discovery: "The letter of Christopher Columbus, to whom our age oweth much touching the newly-found islands beyond the Ganges."

Leonardo spent the whole night over the calculations and the maps. At times he went out upon the loggia and looked at the stars, thinking of this finder of the new heaven and the new earth—that strange dreamer with the mind, and the heart, of a child. Involuntarily he compared this man's destiny with his own.

"How little he knew; how much he did! And I, with all my knowledge, am helpless as the paralysed Berardi. I, too, have aimed at unknown worlds, but have made no step towards them. Faith, say they, faith! But is not perfect

faith the same as perfect knowledge? Cannot these eyes of mine see farther than those eyes of Columbus, the blind prophet? Or is it the caprice of Fate that men must see to know; must be blind to act?"

II

Leonardo did not notice that the night was passing. The stars went out one by one; rosy light overspread the sky and shone upon the tiled roofs and the wooden cross-beams of the old brick houses; the street became gay with the hum of the people going forth to their daily toil. Presently a knock came to the door, and Giovanni Boltraffio entered, to remind his master that this was the day for the "trial by fire."

"What trial?" asked Leonardo.

"Fra Domenico on behalf of Fra Girolamo, and Fra Giuliano Rondinelli on behalf of his enemies, will pass through the fire. That one who is unhurt will be proved by God to be in the right."

"Very good; you can go, Giovanni, and I wish you good entertainment."

"Will you not come also, Master?"

"No. I am busy."

Giovanni took a step towards the door; then, trying to appear indifferent, he said:

"I am sorry you are so occupied. As I came hither I met Messer Paolo Somenzi, who promised

to bring us to a place where we could see excellently. The trial is not till mid-day. If you could finish your work by then, we might yet be in time."

Leonardo smiled. "You want me so much to see the prodigy? Very well, then; we 'll go together."

At the appointed time Messer Paolo Somenzi arrived. He was a spy in the pay of the Duke of Milan, and a bitter enemy of Savonarola's: a restless, fussy little man, with brains of quicksilver.

"How is this, Messer Leonardo?" he began in a harsh disagreeable voice, with much gesticulation. "You thought of refusing your presence? Has this physical experiment no attraction for the devotee of natural science?"

"But will the magistrates really permit them to go into the fire?" asked Leonardo.

"*Chi lo sa?* But one thing is certain, that Fra Domenico will not shrink from the flames. Nor is he the only one. More than two thousand of the citizens, rich and poor, wise and simple, women and children, declared last night at the Convent of San Marco that they were ready to follow Fra Domenico to this singular test. I tell you there is such a frenzy abroad that the most sensible feel their heads go round. The very philosophers are taking fright, and asking themselves if there is not a chance of neither champion being burned. But for my part, I am wondering

how the Piagnoni will look when, on the contrary, the two poor fools are slain before their eyes!"

"Does Savonarola really believe?" exclaimed Leonardo, as if thinking aloud.

"I suspect he has his doubts and would fain draw back. But 't is too late. To his own hurt he has so debauched the imagination of this people that now they require a miracle at all costs. See you, Messer, 't is a pure question of mathematics, and of a kind no less interesting than yours: if God really exist, why should he not do a miracle —why should he not cause two and two to make five? as, verily, the faithful daily request, that the impious like you and me, Messer Leonardo, may be put to eternal confusion."

"Well, let us set forth," said Leonardo, interrupting Messer Paolo with ill-concealed aversion.

"Soft, though," said the other; "one little whisper more. You and I, Messer Leonardo, are of one mind in this matter; and at the day's end we shall cry 'Victory!' whether God exist or no. Two and two will always make four. *Viva la Scienza!* and long live logic!"

The streets were crowded, and on all faces was that air of curiosity and happy expectation which Leonardo had already remarked in Giovanni. The press was greatest in the Via de' Calzaioli before the Orsanmichele, where was a bronze statue by Andrea Verrocchio: The apostle Thomas thrusting his fingers into the wounds

of his Lord. Here the eight theses, the truth or falsity of which was to be demonstrated by the fire, were appended to the wall, "writ large" in vermilion letters. Some of the crowd were spelling them out, others listening and making their comments.

I. The Church of the Lord needs to be born again.
II. God will chastise her.
III. God will transform her.
IV. After the chastisement, Florence also shall be renewed and shall rise above all peoples.
V. The infidels shall be converted.
VI. All this shall happen forthwith.
VII. The excommunication of Savonarola by Pope Alexander VI. is invalid.
VIII. He committeth no sin who holds this excommunication invalid.

Jostled by the crowd, Leonardo and his companions stopped to listen to the remarks of the people.

"It is all gospel truth," said an old artisan; "nevertheless deadly sin may come of it."

"What sin is stinking in your old nostrils, Filippo?" asked a lad, smiling contemptuously.

"There can be no sin in it," said another.

"It 's a trap of the Evil One," said Filippo, undaunted. "We are demanding a miracle. But we may be unworthy of a miracle. Is it not

The Incredulity of St. Thomas (Verrocchio, Milan).

Photo by Alinari.

written in Scripture, 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God'?"

"Hold your tongue, old man! Is not a mustard-seed of faith able to raise mountains? God cannot avoid a miracle once we have faith."

"No! He can't! He can't!" cried many voices.

"But who is to go into the fire first? Fra Domenico or Fra Girolamo?"

"The two together."

"No, Fra Girolamo will only pray, He is not going in."

"You don't know what you are talking about. 'T will be first Fra Domenico, then Fra Girolamo, and then all of us who wrote ourselves down last night at the convent."

"Is it true that Fra Girolamo is going to raise a dead man?"

"Of course it is true! First the trial by fire, and then the resurrection of the dead. I, myself, have seen his letter to the Pope. He challenges him to send a man who shall descend into a tomb with Fra Girolamo, and say to the dead, 'Come forth!' He who shall resuscitate the corpse shall be the true prophet; and the other the deceiver."

"Have faith, brothers, only have faith! Many miracles await you. Ye shall see the Son of Man in his flesh and bones coming on the clouds, and other wonders, of which ancient times had not even the conception!"

At these words several cried "Amen!" and all faces grew pale, and all eyes burned with the wild fires of fanaticism. The crowd moved on, carrying Messer Paolo and the others with it. Giovanni threw one more look at Verrocchio's bronze figure. In the good-humoured, half-contemptuous smile of the incredulous apostle, he seemed to see the smile of Leonardo.

III

As they approached the Piazza della Signoria, the press was so great that Paolo requested one of the mounted guards to escort them as far as the balcony, where places were reserved for the orators and for the more important of the citizens.

Never, thought Giovanni, had he seen so great a multitude. Not only was the square packed with spectators, but the loggias, the towers, windows, and roofs of the houses. Like limpets, they clung to the iron lamp-brackets, gratings, gutters, eaves, rain-pipes. They hustled each other and fought for room, and some fell and were trampled out of life. All the approaches to the piazza were rigorously barred with iron posts and chains; at three places only, men of full age and unarmed were permitted to pass singly.

Messer Paolo explained to his companions the manner in which the pyre was constructed. There were two long narrow piles of wood smeared with tar and sprinkled with powder, which

extended from the Ringhiera or rostrum, where stood the Marzocco (the ancient lion of Florence), as far as to the Tettoia de' Pisani. Between the two piles was a narrow lane, paved with stones, sand, and clay, along which the two friars were to pass.

At the appointed hour the Franciscans appeared from one side, the Dominicans from the other; the procession was closed by Fra Domenico, in a velvet habit of brilliant red, and Fra Girolamo, dressed in white, and bearing the *Ostensorio*, which glittered in the sunlight. The Dominicans intoned a Psalm:

"Come and see the works of God; he is terrible in his doing toward the children of men!"

And the crowd responded, "Hosanna, Hosanna! Blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord!"

The enemies of Savonarola occupied half the Loggia dei Lanzi, his followers the opposite half, a partition having been erected between them. All was now ready; nothing remained but to light the fire and call forth the champions.

At last the judges of the trial came from the Palazzo Vecchio, and every one held his breath and watched what they would do; but after speaking a few words in a low voice with Fra Domenico they retired again, and suspense reigned as before. Fra Giuliano Rondinelli had gone out of sight. Then the tension of spirit became almost insupportable, and the crowd stood on tiptoe, and craned their necks, making

the sign of the cross and telling their beads, and murmuring childish prayers: "Lord, Lord! perform us a miracle!"

The air was sultry; a thunderstorm was drawing nearer and growls of thunder, which had been heard at intervals all day, were becoming louder and more insistent. Certain members of the council, in long robes of red cloth, like the togas of ancient Rome, issued from the Palazzo Vecchio and took places on the Ringhiera; an old man with spectacles and a quill behind his ear, evidently the clerk, tried to recall them with shouts of:

"Messeri! Messeri! the sitting is not ended! the voting is in progress!"

"To the devil with the voting," said one of the magistrates; "I have had my fill of this stupid discussion. The noise has broken my ear-drum."

"What is the use of deliberation?" said another. "If they wish to burn themselves let them do it, and Good-night to them!"

"By my troth, it were homicide!"

"And an excellent homicide too! Two fools less on earth."

"But they must be burned according to the rule and canon of the Holy Church. It 's a delicate theological question."

"Well, then, propose the question to the Pope."

"What have we to do with the Pope? We are concerned with the people. If by such means one could restore the people to sanity, there

Savonarola (Florence).

Photo by Brogi.

would be no great evil in sending all the priests and friars in the world, not only into the fire, but into the water and under the ground likewise."

"Water will serve. Throw them both into a tub of water, and let him who comes forth dry be the victor. 'T would be a thought less dangerous than these pranks."

"Have you heard, most honourable signiors," said Messer Paolo, with deep reverences, "that poor Fra Giuliano has fallen sick in his stomach? 'T is a malady caused by fear, and he has been bled for it."

"Sir," exclaimed an old man of imposing aspect, his face showing at once distress and intelligence, "you make a jest of everything. But I, when I hear such talk from the men highest in the state, I ask myself whether it were not better to die. Truly, if the founders of this city could rise from the dead and see the folly and the infamy of this day's proceedings, they would flee back into their graves for shame."

The judges, meanwhile, came and went incessantly from the Loggia to the Palazzo, from the Palazzo to the Loggia, and it seemed as if the deliberations were to have no end.

The Franciscans first accused Savonarola of having enchanted Fra Domenico's habit; he therefore removed it, but it was alleged that sorcery might have influenced his under garments. He retired into the Palazzo Vecchio, stripped himself naked, and donned the vesture of another.

Then the Franciscans demanded that he should hold aloof from Savonarola, lest his new garments should be enchanted; and that he should give up the cross which he held. To this Domenico consented, but protested that he would not enter the flames without the Holy Sacrament in his hands. The Franciscans at this swore that Savonarola's disciple wished sacrilegiously to burn the body and blood of Christ. In vain Domenico and Girolamo replied that the Holy Sacrament could not be reduced to ashes; the material part (*modus*) might indeed be burned, but not the eternal and incorruptible part (*substantia*). An interminable scholastic dispute now began between the two parties.

The crowd in the piazza was beginning to murmur, and dense black clouds were spreading over the sky. Suddenly from behind the Palazzo Vecchio and the Via de' Leoni where the lions of Florence were kept in cages, a prolonged and hungry roar was heard. The mob imagined that the bronze Marzocco, indignant with his city, was roaring out his wrath. They responded with a sound no less furious, no less hungry:

"Have done! Have done! To the fire at once! Fra Girolamo! We *will* have the miracle! We *will* have the miracle!"

At this cry Savonarola, who had been kneeling in prayer, rose, shook himself, approached the parapet of the Loggia and with imposing gesture commanded silence. But the people refused to

be silent. And then some one from under the Tettoia de' Pisani cried:

"He 's afraid!"

And this cry was taken up and passed along.

A company of horsemen of the Arrabbiati tried to push their way to the Loggia to fall upon Savonarola and seize him, making their profit of the confusion.

"Kill him! Kill him! Down with the cursed schismatic!" was the shout.

Boltraffio closed his eyes that he might not see those furious faces which had now lost all look of humanity; nothing, he thought, could save Savonarola from being torn to pieces.

At this moment the storm broke. Rain descended, the like of which had not been seen in Florence.

It endured but a short time, and when it was over the trial by fire had become an impossibility. For between the twin piles of faggots the water ran with the fury of a channel hemmed in between dykes.

Some laughed.

"Well done, friars! They undertook to tread the fire, but they 've got to swim for it! That 's their miracle, eh?"

Cursed by the crowd, Savonarola on his return to his convent was escorted by soldiers, and Giovanni's heart bled as he watched the deposed prophet, kicked and buffeted, making his way with faltering step, his eyes on the ground, his

white garb splashed with the mire of the streets. Leonardo saw his disciple's wan face, and, as before at the "Burning of Vanities," took his hand and led him away.

IV

Next day in the Casa Berardi, sitting in the chamber which was so like a ship's cabin, Leonardo tried to prove to Messer Guido that Columbus had erred in locating Paradise on a swelling upon a pear-shaped earth. At first Guido listened and argued, then mournful silence fell on him. He was vexed with his friend for telling him the truth. Presently he discovered pains in his legs, and had himself carried away.

"Why have I hurt him?" thought Leonardo. "He wants a miracle too!"

Turning over his note-book, his eyes fell on the words he had written that night when the Milanese mob had attacked his house for the seizure of the Holy Nail: "O marvellous justice of Thee, Thou Prime Mover, who hast denied to no force the order and the qualities of its necessary effect!"

"There!" he exclaimed, "there is the miracle!"

And his thoughts turned to his *Cenacolo* and to the face of Christ, still sought for, not yet found; and he felt that between this inviolable law of Necessity, and the perfect wisdom of Him who said, "One of you shall betray me," there existed a deep correlation.

In the evening Giovanni came with the day's news. The Signoria had exiled Fra Girolamo and Fra Domenico from the city; and the "Enraged," brooking no delay, had besieged San Marco with a countless throng of armed persons, and had broken into the church where the brothers were at vespers. They defended themselves, fighting with burning tapers, candlesticks, and crucifixes; in the cloud of smoke they seemed ridiculous as angry doves. One climbed on the roof and hurled stones down from it. Another fired an arquebus from the altar, shouting at each discharge "*Viva Cristo!*" Presently the monastery was taken by storm.

The brethren entreated Savonarola to flee, but he, together with Domenico, gave himself up, and they were haled to prison. The guards were unable or unwilling to defend them from the insults of the crowd, who struck Fra Girolamo from behind, crying:

"Prophesy unto us, thou man of God, who is he that smote thee?"

Others crawled at his feet as though seeking something, and cried: "The key? The key? Where is Fra Girolamo's key?"—in allusion to the key often spoken of in his sermons, with which he would unlock the secrets of the abominations of Rome.

The very children who had belonged to the Sacred Troop of inquisitors now pelted him with apples and rotten eggs. Those who could not

penetrate the crowd howled from a distance, reiterating their abuse till their throats were hoarse:

"Dastard! Coward! Judas! Sodomite! Sorcerer! Antichrist!"

Giovanni followed him to the doors of the prison of the Palazzo Vecchio, whence he was not to issue till the day of his execution.

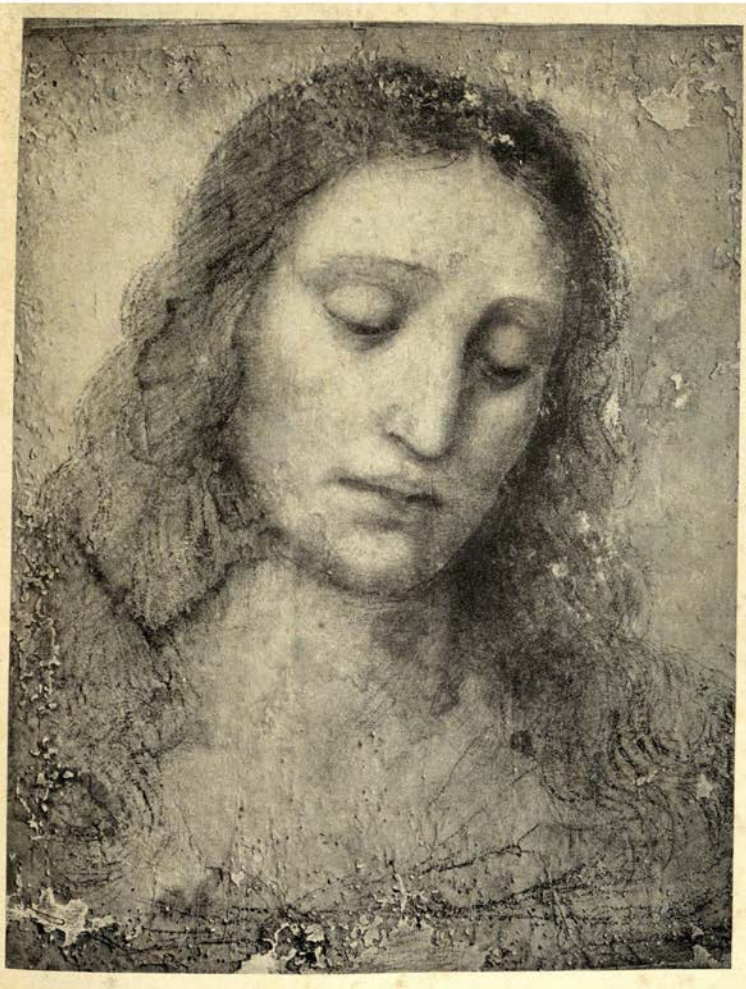
On the following morning Leonardo and Boltraffio quitted Florence.

At once, on arrival in Milan, the painter set himself to the task which had baffled him for eighteen years—the face of the Christ in the *Last Supper*.

V

On the very day of that trial by fire, which in Florence had had such bad results—Charles VIII., King of France, died very suddenly. The news was of sinister import to Il Moro, for the Duke of Orleans, who was now to ascend the throne as Louis XII., was descended from Valentina Visconti, daughter of the first Duke of Milan. He claimed to be the only legitimate heir of the dominion of Lombardy, and now proposed to reconquer it, annihilating "the robber nest of the Sforzas."

Shortly before the change of sovereigns in France, there had taken place at the Milanese Court what was called a "scientific duel," and



The Head of the Christ (Leonardo da Vinci, Milan).

Photo by Anderson.

Il Moro had found so much entertainment that he proposed another for a day two months later. Now that war was impending some supposed he would postpone this duel, but Ludovico, who was an adept in the arts of dissimulation, had no such intention. He wished his enemies to think he cared little for their designs, but was absorbed in that revival of art and learning, "the fruit of golden peace," which flourished under his mild rule, and brought him the fame of being the most enlightened Italian potentate, the protector of the Muses, protected not merely by the arms but by the admiration of his people.

Accordingly on the appointed day, in the Great Hall of the Rocchetta, which was called the *Sala per il giuoco della palla*, there assembled all the doctors, deans, and masters of the University of Pavia, wearing their scarlet four-cornered *berrette*, their ermine-bordered hoods, their violet gloves, and pouches of gold embroidery. Ladies were present dressed in sumptuous festal robes, amongst them Lucrezia and Cecilia, sitting together at the foot of Ludovico's throne. The proceedings were opened by a pompous oration from Giorgio Merula, in which the Duke was likened to Pericles, Epaminondas, Scipio, Cato, Augustus, Mæcenas, and other worthies, while Milan was celebrated as the new Athens, of surpassing glory. Then followed a theological dispute on the Immaculate Conception, then medical discussions on the following questions:

"Is a handsome woman more prolific than an ugly one?

"Was the healing of Tobias natural?"

"Is woman an incomplete creation?"

"In what part of the body was formed the water which issued from the side of the crucified Christ?"

"Is woman more sensual than man?"

Then came the turn of the philosophers, on the unity or the plurality of primal matter.

"Be good enough to expound me this apophthegm," said a toothless old man with venomous smile, and eyes dull and troubled as those of a sucking babe; a great doctor of scholastics, who thoroughly understood the confounding of opponents by subtle distinctions (*quidditas et habitus*) which nobody could understand.

Alone and thoughtful as was his custom, Leonardo was listening, and now and then his lips curled.

VI

Pointing to Leonardo, the Countess Cecilia whispered to the Duke, who called up the artist, and begged him to take part in the discussion.

"Be kind," insisted the Countess. "Do it for my sake——"

"Lay aside your bashfulness," said Ludovico, "and tell us something entertaining. Speak to us of your observations upon nature. Do we

not know that your brain is always stuffed with chimeras?"

"Your Excellency must excuse me. Madonna Cecilia, I would gladly please a lady, but, truly, I cannot——"

Leonardo was not feigning. He was neither able nor willing to speak before a crowd. An insuperable barrier seemed to lie between his thought and his word, as if speech must either exaggerate or be inadequate to the sense, modify or vitiate it. In his note-books he continually cancelled, erased, corrected, and revised; in conversation he stammered, lost the thread, sought for words and could not find them. He called both orators and authors "babblers," but in secret he envied them. The frequent glibness of insignificant persons was a wonder and an annoyance to him.

"That God should give such men such skill!" he would say, with a kind of ingenuous admiration.

However, the more firmly Leonardo declined the task offered him, so much the more did the ladies insist.

"We beseech you, Messere! We all pray you with one voice. Tell us, tell us something entertaining!"

"Tell us how men are to fly!" suggested Madonna Fiordiligi.

"Nay, but speak to us of sorcery!" cried Madonna Ermellina; "something of black magic! 'T is so interesting, this necromancy. Explain

to us how they raise the dead men from their graves!"

"I assure you, Madonna, I have never raised any dead person from his grave."

Then take some other theme, so it be terrible, and have no savour of mathematics."

Leonardo was always hard put to it to refuse a beggar, and he could only repeat with embarrassment:

"Truly, Madonna, I am incapable——"

But Ermellina interrupted him, clapping her hands:

"He consents! He consents! Silence for Messer Leonardo! Listen ye all!"

"Eh? Who? What?" asked the dean of the theological faculty, who was deaf, and somewhat fallen into dotage.

"'T is Leonardo!" shouted his neighbour into his ear.

"Leonardo Pisano, the mathematical professor?"

"No, Leonardo da Vinci himself."

"Is he doctor or master?"

"No, nor even bachelor. Leonardo, the painter of the *Cenacolo*."

"Is he going to speak of painting?"

"It seems he will speak of natural science."

"Are the painters so learned? I have never heard of this Leonardo. What has he written?"

"Nothing that I know of."

"Nay," said another, "'t is certain that he writes, for they say he uses his left hand, and

produces a caligraphy proper only to himself, which none can read."

"Which none can read? With his left hand?" said the old dean.

"I take it, gentlemen, this speech will be some jest; an interlude to entertain the Duke and the ladies."

"Very like 't will be ridiculous. We shall see."

"Just so, just so. 'T is necessary to amuse the folk of the Court. And painters are witty fellows enough. Buffalmacco, now—they said he was a perfect jester. Well, let us see what this Leonardo is good for."

And the old man polished his spectacles, the better to enjoy the comedy.

Leonardo was still looking supplicatingly at the Duke, but though smiling, Ludovico was determined; and the Countess Cecilia menaced the hesitant with her finger.

"If I refuse I shall offend them," thought the artist; "and very soon I shall be requiring bronze for the *Cavallo.* Well, I will say the first thing that comes into my head, just to be quit of the business."

And with desperate resolution he mounted the tribune and threw a glance upon the learned assembly. Then, blushing and stammering like a boy who does not know his lesson, he began:

"I must warn you, gentlemen, I am not prepared. . . . 'T is to please the Duke. I

would say—I mean—in fine, I will speak to you about shells."

And he told of petrified marine animals, the imprints of coral, and water-plants found on hills and in valleys far removed from the sea, evidence of how the face of the earth has been changing from time immemorial. There, where now are hills and dry land, once was the ocean. Water, the mover of Nature, her "charioteer," creates and destroys the very mountains; the shores gradually remove into the centre of the sea, and the inland seas lay bare their beds, traversed by some river which ever hurries toward the sea, scoring for itself a deep channel. Thus the Po, which now rushes across the dried-up lake of Lombardy, will eventually score itself a deep channel across the dried-up Adriatic; and the Nile, when the Mediterranean has become a country of hills and plains like Egypt and Libya, will empty itself into the Atlantic Ocean beyond the Pillars of Hercules.

"I am convinced," said Leonardo in conclusion, "that the study of petrified plants and animals, which we have hitherto neglected, will lay the foundation of a new science of our earth: of its past, and of its future."

Notwithstanding the awkwardness of his delivery, Leonardo's ideas were so clear and precise, his faith in knowledge was so sure, all he had said was so unlike the Pythagorean ravings of the previous disputant, and the dry bones of

logic in the mouths of the learned doctors, that when he stopped speaking a stupor of amazement was seen on the faces of the audience. Were they to laugh or to applaud? Was this talk of a new science the vain chatter of a presumptuous fool?

"Truly, my Leonardo," said the Duke, condescendingly, as if speaking to a child, "it would be famous fun if the Adriatic were to dry up and leave our enemies, the Venetians, stranded like crabs on a sandbank."

At this they all laughed, well pleased to be told the line they were to take, for courtiers are ever weathercocks turned by the wind. Messer Gabriele Pirovano, the Rector of the University of Pavia, an old gentleman with silver hair, fine manners, and a dignified but somewhat foolish face, thus delivered himself, reflecting in his smile the condescending kindness of the Duke:

"Messer Leonardo, the information you have given us is very interesting; but were it not perhaps simpler to explain the origin of these little shells, as a charming (we might even say poetic) but wholly accidental freak of nature, rather than as the foundation of an entire new science? Or, as others have done before us, we might account for their presence by the catastrophe of the universal Deluge."

"Oh, the Deluge!" said Leonardo, who had conquered his shyness and now spoke with a freedom which to many appeared excessive and

even irreverent; "I know that explanation, but it won't do at all. Judge for yourself, Messer Gabriele. According to the man who measured it, the level of the waters of the flood exceeded by ten cubits the tops of the highest mountains. The shells would have settled on the summits, not on the sides or the feet of the mountains, nor within caverns; and, withal, they would have settled at haphazard according to the pleasure of the waters, and not everywhere at the same level, not in consecutive layers, as we find by observation. And further, here is a wondrous thing. We find collected together all those creatures which are used to live in societies, such as oysters, cuttlefish, molluscs; while those which are used to be solitary are scattered singly in their fossil state just as we find their descendants now on the seashore. I myself have often noted the position of these petrified shells in Tuscany and in Lombardy and in Piedmont. And if you tell me 't was not the waves carried them, but that of themselves they gradually rose in crowds above the water as it grew higher, that, too, is easily refuted, for a shellfish is as slow a beast as a snail. It floats not, but crawls with its valves over sand and stones, and the farthest it can go in a day's hard journeying is some three or four arm-lengths. How then, Messer Gabriele, would you explain, that in the forty days of the flood's duration, your shellfish could creep the two hundred and fifty miles

which divide the hills of Monferrato from the shores of the Adriatic? Only he who, despising experiment and observation, judges of nature from books, can maintain such an argument; not he who has had the curiosity to see with his own eyes those things of which he speaks."

An uncomfortable silence followed; all felt that the Rector's reply had been a trifle weak. Then the Court astrologer, Ambrogio da Rosate, a great favourite of the Duke's, advanced another explanation based on Pliny's natural history; which was that the petrified shapes which looked like marine animals had been formed in the interior of the earth by the magic working of the stars.

At the word magic, a resigned smile played over Leonardo's lips. "Then, Messer Ambrogio," he replied, "how would you explain the fact that the stars in the one place should make animals not only of many kinds but of various ages? (for the age of shells can be ascertained no less than the age of horns or of trees). What say you to finding some of these shells entire, some broken, some mixed with sand, mud, the claws of crabs, fish-bones, and rubble, such as you may see any day on the seashore; and the delicate imprint of leaves on the rocks of the highest mountains, and marine weeds clinging to the shells, petrified and blended into one lump with them? From the working of the stars, say you? If this is to be our reasoning, Messere, then in all nature there will be no phenomenon

for which you cannot account by the starry influences, and all science outside astrology is useless."

Here an old doctor of scholastic interposed, saying that the dispute was irregular.

"For," he exclaimed, "either this question of fossils belongs to a vulgar, mechanical science, alien to metaphysic, and hence not to be discussed in an assembly met to contend solely about philosophical questions, or it verily pertains to the true, the sublime science of dialectic; in which case it must be discussed according to the laws of dialectic, which alone allows theory to ascend to the sphere of pure speculation."

"I understand you, Messere," said Leonardo, patiently; "I have thought of what you say. But the alternative is not as you state it."

"Not as I state it?" cried the veteran, smiling angrily, "not as I state it? Then, sir, pray let us hear how *you* propose to state it!"

"Nay, nay; I had no wish to offend. In fine, I spoke but of shells. I think—nay, Messere, but there is no vulgar science, nor is there sublime science. There is but one science; that which is based upon the experience of the senses."

"The experience of the senses? Then where would you put the metaphysic of Aristotle, of Plato, of Plotinus, and of all the ancient philosophers who speculated upon God, upon the soul, and upon the essences? Would you say of all this——?"

"That it is not science," replied Leonardo, calmly. "I recognise the greatness of the ancients, but not in that respect. In science they mistook the road. They wished to learn what was beyond the reach of knowledge, and what was within their reach they despised. They led men astray for many ages. Discussing matters which admit not of proof, it is impossible for men to agree; the less so if they would make up for the lack of proof by vehemence of clamour. He who truly *knows* has no occasion to shout. The voice of truth is unique; and when it has spoken, all the noise of dispute must be hushed. If the cries continue, it means that the truth has not yet been found. Do we need mathematical dispute as to whether twice three be six or five? or whether the angles of a triangle be or be not equal to two right angles? In these instances doth not contradiction cease in the presence of truth? and is not truth to be enjoyed as it never can be enjoyed in sophistical and imaginary sciences?"

Leonardo would have spoken further, but after a glance at the face of his opponent he became silent.

"Ah!" said the doctor of scholastic, ironically, "I thought we should arrive at an agreement! You and I were certain to understand one another! But one thing I do not understand. Pardon the ignorance of an old man! If our knowledge of God and of a future life, not being confirmed by the testimony of our senses, but by the testimony of Holy Writ——"

"I spoke not of this," interrupted Leonardo; "I leave out of the dispute the books inspired by God, for they are of the substance of supreme truth."

He was not allowed to continue; uproar ensued. Some shouted, some laughed; some, springing from their chairs, turned wrathful faces on him, while others, shrugging their shoulders, left the assembly.

"Make an end! Make an end!"

"But, gentlemen, permit me to reply——"

"There is no occasion for reply."

"When things are stated contrary to sense ——"

"I desire to speak!"

"Plato and Aristotle!——"

"Not worth a rotten egg!"

"But I ask, shall this be permitted? The truth of our Holy Mother Church——"

"Heresy! Heresy! Atheism!"

Leonardo remained silent, his face calm and sad. He was alone among these men who believed themselves the servants of knowledge, and he saw the impassable gulf which separated him from them. He was displeased, not with his opponents, but with himself for having broken his accustomed silence, and become entangled in an argument; for having conceived (in defiance of experience) that it were possible to reveal the truth unto men, or that they were able to receive it.

As for the Duke, though he had long lost the

thread of the argument, he continued to follow the disputation with delight.

"Good! Really good!" he applauded, rubbing his hands. "Madonna Cecilia, will they not, think you, presently come to blows? Look at that old fellow, shaking all over, brandishing his cap, clenching his fists! And the little black one behind him, foaming at the mouth! And all about a few fossil shells! Fine madman, these scholars! kittle cattle! And our Leonardo, who pretended to be possessed by a dumb devil!"

And they laughed, watching the scientific duel as if it were a cock-fight.

"I shall have to save my Leonardo," said Il Moro at last, "or these red-capped folk will claw him."

And he rose and passed through the crowd of infuriated philosophers, who suddenly were hushed into silence as they made way for him. Soothing oil had been poured upon stormy waves; one smile from the prince sufficed for the reconciliation of metaphysics and natural science. He closed the discussion by a courteous invitation to supper.

"I am glad," he said, with his usual gaiety, "that the Adriatic is not yet dry; because I trust that its oysters, which I have had cooked for your entertainment, may give rise to less contention than the shells of Messer Leonardo."

VII

During the supper Fra Luca Pacioli, who was sitting beside Leonardo da Vinci, whispered in his ear:

"Forgive me, friend, that I kept silence when they attacked you. They did not understand your meaning, but you might easily make an alliance with them, for the one opinion does not exclude the other. Avoid extremes."

"I entirely agree with you, Fra Luca," replied Leonardo.

"That 's the way—love and concord. What is the object of dissension? Metaphysics are good, and mathematics are good! Room for both. Is it not so, dear friend?"

"Precisely so, Fra Luca."

"I was sure you would agree. You give in to me, I give in to you; we are allied, you with us, we with you."

Leonardo looked at the astute countenance of the mathematical monk, who reconciled Pythagoras and Thomas Aquinas so easily; and he thought:

"The calf sucks from two dams."

Then the alchemist, Galeotto Sacrobosco, raising his glass and bending towards Leonardo with the air of an accomplice, said:

"To your good health, Master! How skilfully you played them on the line! What a subtle allegory!"

"Allegory?" repeated Leonardo, stupefied.

"To be sure, Messere. No call for mystery with me. We shall not betray one another. By dry land you meant sulphur; by the sun, salt; by the ocean which overflowed the mountains, quicksilver. Do I catch your meaning?

"Precisely, Messer Galeotto."

"You see even we are good for something! As for the shells, by them you intended the philosopher's stone, the alchemist's secret, composed of what? why, of sulphur, salt, and quicksilver!"

And he laughed his jolly child-like laugh, raising his forefinger and arching his brows, which were scorched by the fury of his immense furnaces.

"And all these great doctors with their red caps understand not a word of it! To your health, Messer Leonardo, and to the glory of alchemy, our common mother!"

"I honour the toast, Messer Galeotto. And as I see nothing can be concealed from you, I will vex you with no further mysteries."

After supper the party broke up; only a small and selected company were invited by the Duke into a cool snug room, where wine and fruits were served.

"Most charming! Insurpassable!" cried Madonna Ermellina. "I should never have conceived it could be so diverting. Better than a *festa!* How they shouted at Leonardo! Pity he

might not finish—he would have told us of his spells and necromancy."

"Perchance 't is calumny," said an old courtier; "but I am told the infection of heresy has so taken hold of Leonardo, that he scarce credits the existence of God. He holds it of greater moment to be a philosopher than a Christian."

'T is mere babble," said the Duke. "I know the man well, and I swear he has a heart of gold. He is violent in word, but in practice would not hurt a flea. He dangerous! Would that all dangerous ones were as he! The Father Inquisitors would have him, but let them roar! None shall hurt a hair of my Leonardo!"

"And our posterity will praise Your Excellency for having protected a genius so extraordinary," said Messer Baldassare Castiglione, a very elegant cavalier from the Court of Urbino. "'T is pity," he added, "that the man should neglect his art to give himself to dreams and chimeras."

"True, Messer Baldassare; I have often reproached him. But painters, you know, are an unmanageable race."

"Your Excellency speaks well," said the Commissioner of the Salt Tax, who was burning to tell a tale of Leonardo; painters are impracticable folk. T'other day I came to his studio seeking an allegorical drawing for a marriage chest. 'Is the master at home?' say I. 'No,' is the reply, 'he hath gone forth, greatly busied, to measure the weight of the air.' Truly, I thought

the youth mocked me; but when I met Leonardo himself and taxed him with this folly, he confessed it, looking at me as if he thought I were a fool. Ladies, how like you the notion? and how many grains will you find in the spring zephyr?"

"I know worse of him than that," said a young lord with a vulgar self-complacent face; "he has invented a boat which travels up stream, yet without oars."

"How doth it travel?"

"On wheels, by steam."

"A boat with wheels? Nay, sir, this must be your invention of this moment!"

"I had it of Fra Luca Pacioli, who had seen the design. Leonardo conceives that in steam lies a force able to move large ships, let alone little boats."

"You see! You see! Did I not tell you!" cried Madonna Ermellina; "this is his necromancy, black magic pure and simple!"

" 'T is not to be denied he is mad!" said the Duke, with his urbane smile; "for all that I wish him well. In his company I never weary!"

VIII

Leonardo went homewards by the quiet suburb of Porta Vercellina. It was a lovely evening. Goats were contentedly browsing along the edge of the road; and a rugged sunburnt little lad was driving a flock of geese. Storm-clouds, lined with gold, were rising in the north over the un-

seen Alps, and high up in the clear sky there burned a single star.

The artist walked slowly; he was thinking of the scientific dispute which he had just left, and then his thoughts went back to the trial by fire at which he had been present in Florence. He could not but think the two duels resembled each other like twins.

A little girl of six was eating rye-bread and onions on the outside staircase of a cottage. He called her, and after a moment's hesitation, reassured by his smile, she trotted to him, smiling herself. He gave her a sugared and gilded orange which he had brought from the supper.

"Gold ball!" said the child.

"No, not a ball. A sort of apple. Try it; 't is sweet within."

She continued to stare ecstatically at the unfamiliar dainty.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Maia."

"I wonder, Maia, if you know how the cock, the goat, and the donkey went a-fishing together?"

"No."

"Shall I tell you?"

And he fondled her soft wild curls with his delicate, almost womanish, hand. "Come here then! Let us sit down! Wait a minute, though, I think I have some nice cakes also, as you won't try my golden apple!" And he turned out his pockets. A young woman now appeared, looked

at Maia and at the stranger, nodded approvingly, and seated herself with her distaff. Then came also the grandmother, a bent old woman with eyes like Maia's. She, too, looked at Leonardo; but suddenly, as if recognising him, she made a sign with her hands and whispered to her daughter, who sprang up saying:

"Maia! Maia! Come away at once!"

The child hesitated.

"Come, run, naughty one; unless you wish——"

The little girl was frightened and fled to the grandmother, who snatched the orange from her and flung it over the wall to the pigs. The child cried, but the old woman whispered something in her ear which at once checked her sobs, and she sat gazing at Leonardo with wide eyes full of terror. The painter turned away, well understanding. The old woman thought him a sorcerer capable of bewitching the child. A sad smile on his lips, still mechanically searching for the cakes no longer needed, pained at heart by the little one's needless fear, he felt himself more of an outcast than in face of the crowd which had sought to kill him, the learned men who fancied his truths the ravings of a madman. He felt himself as far removed from his fellows as was that solitary star shining in the still undarkened sky.

He went home and shut himself into his study. With its dusty scientific instruments and its dull books, it seemed to him gloomy as a prison.

However, he lighted a candle, seated himself, and became immersed in his latest research, an inquiry into the laws of the motion of bodies travelling on an inclined plane. Like music, mathematics had ever for him a soothing influence; and to-night, they brought him the hoped-for consolation. Having finished his calculations, he took his diary, and writing with his left hand, and from right to left, so that reading must be in a mirror, he recorded a few thoughts roused by the scientific disputation.

"The disciples of Aristotle, men of words and of books, because I am not a *letterato* like themselves, think me incapable of speech on my own subjects. They perceive not that my matters are to be expounded rather by experience than by words; experience, which truly was mistress of all those who have written well; which I will take for my mistress, by which, in all cases, I will stand or fall."

The candle had burned low; and the cat, faithful comrade of his sleepless nights, sprang on the table, purring and rubbing herself against him. The solitary star, seen through the undusted windows, seemed still farther away, still less attainable. He remembered Maia's frightened eyes, but he had vanquished his melancholy. He was solitary, yes, but undaunted and serene. Nevertheless, unknown to himself, there was bitterness in the secret depth of his heart like a hot spring beneath the ice of a frozen river;

there was almost remorse, as if, verily, he were guilty concerning Maia; as if there were something for which he was unable entirely to forgive himself.

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